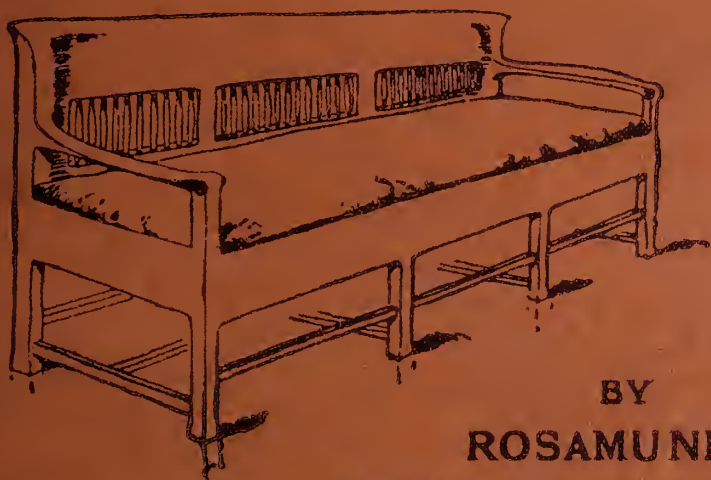


# THE ART OF THE HOUSE



BY  
ROSAMUND  
MARRIOTT WATSON





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To Ben and Mary  
Christina  
1904

THE CONNOISSEUR SERIES.

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THE ART OF THE HOUSE.

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# THE ART OF THE HOUSE

BY ROSAMUND MAR-  
RIOTT WATSON

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TO

R. A. M. STEVENSON

THESE PAGES ARE INSCRIBED WITH AFFECTION

AND ESTEEM

## NOTE.

THESE essays on the furnishing and decoration of the home appeared in the "Pall Mall Gazette" under the heading of "Wares of Autolycus," and are reprinted by permission of the Editor. They have been revised and extended by the author, and are here supplemented by many illustrations from the loan collection at Bethnal Green, the South Kensington Museum, and elsewhere.

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AN EMPIRE COT.



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# THE ART OF THE HOUSE.

## CHAPTER I.

### SOME PRINCIPLES OF DECORATION.

INDIVIDUAL taste—or the lack of it—in arrangement and decoration has made no very decided movement of any kind for some considerable time past. Matters remain, in the mass, much as they were; the intelligent upholsterer who receives *carte blanche* from affluent patrons still adds, “to make the place look homely,” his finishing touches in the shape of scattered volumes that bear the seal and superscription of Mudie; the no less intelligent amateur still pursues the uneven tenor of her way, mingling foul with fair, heaping together objects which—well enough in themselves—disparage and nullify each the other’s charms when forced into companionship; lighting, by chance-medley, now and again, on a pleasing harmony, but more often failing to achieve aught but incoherency and fatuity of effect.

There are exceptions, of course, and these do but the more emphatically prove the rule. And the reason of this inconsistency, this inability to grasp the situation as a whole, this predominance of zeal over discrimination in the large majority is not far to seek; it arises in part from the wide-

spread superstition that the sense of sight needs no education ; partly from the influence of fashion ; and partly, also, from the fact that the true *flair* for decorative beauty is almost as rare as the gift of divination, or the power of abstention from verse-writing. He of antique anecdotal fame, who, on being asked as to whether he could play the violin, responded genially that he did not know because he had never tried, was diffidence incarnated by comparison with most of those who furnish houses. The judicious choice of a wall-paper, the right selection and disposal of furniture, is taken for granted as being thrown in with the rest of the feminine arts ; the housewife who is dissatisfied with her own arrangement of her own drawing-room, or who entertains misgivings as to her heaven-born ability for grouping flowers to the best advantage, were hard, indeed, to find.

And yet each of these accomplishments is a separate science in itself, and—though capable of modification to suit with individual predilections and whimsies—founded on principles as well-defined as those that govern the composition of a sonnet, a picture, or a fugue. Each has its own more or less subtle laws of being, its own code of transgressions and gamut of merits. There is, of course, nothing positively wrong in taking delight in uncomely, or even hideous, surroundings ; many estimable and talented persons have passed through life unconscious, and uncareful, of their singularly ugly material environment. Some of the most illustrious writers of to-day inhabit rooms and houses that, decoratively speaking, are a slur upon civilization. And this merely from the absence of development in one particular direction. Yet there lies a certain unexplained, and, perhaps, inexplicable mystery in the established

fact that one who can, and does, both appreciate and translate into fitting words the best glories of the best sort of sunset, or of a cherry tree in blossom, will spend, year in, year out, the main portion of his time in company with goods and chattels that are positively detestable, within the shelter of walls so bedizened as to be in open revolt against all accepted principles of beauty.

"There are," observes the hero of a clever Transatlantic novel, "some things as can be altered, and others as can't—let's alter them as can," and the saying is not without its modicum of wisdom. Ourselves, whom time and care and sickness seem all joined in a conspiracy to disfigure, it were vain to consider from any standpoint of comeliness; we are, for the more part, "not fair to outward view;" neither, as it very frequently happens, are the features, topographical or architectural, of our immediate neighbourhood. These are things out of our control that cannot well be altered, and perhaps are no great matter after all. But with indoor decoration it is altogether otherwise; you can make what you will of the house you live in, either a mere shelter from the weather, a box of brick or stone, where you eat and sleep and pass your days in as much material ease as you can compass; or, on the other hand, a refuge that may be even as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land, an oasis of infinite peace and suggestion, a place that pleases and satisfies both eye and intellect at once.

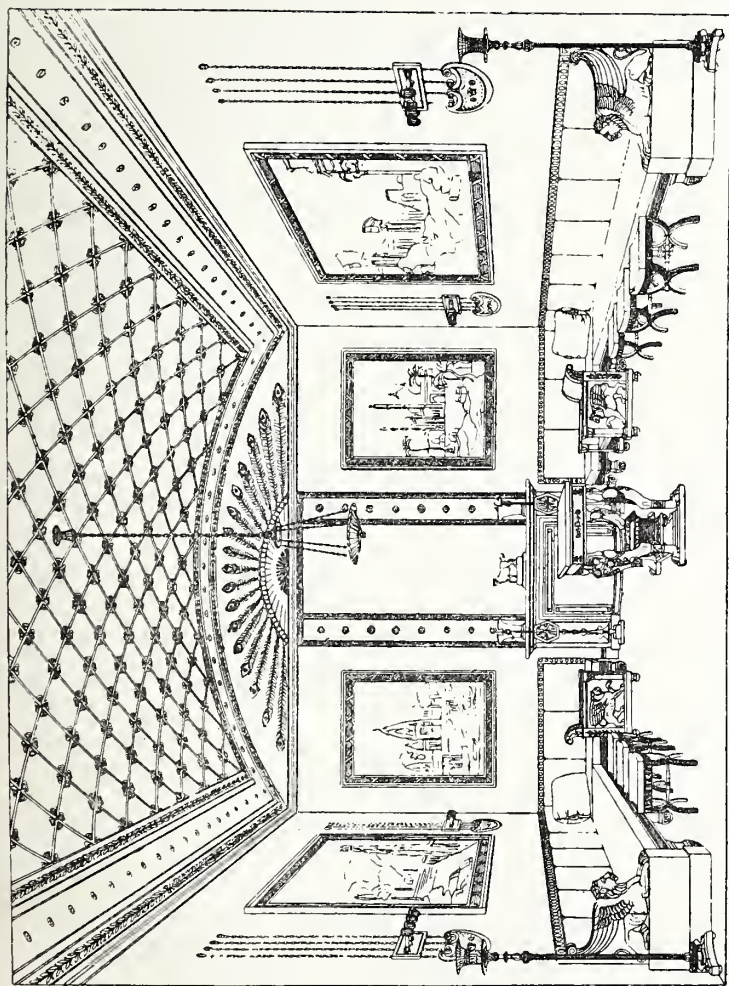
It is best, for obvious reasons, to have some definite scheme of decoration from the outset: to determine firmly as to which path you shall follow. To put it broadly, ignoring all minor complexities of grade and detail, there are two

distinct and different ways of constructing the House Beautiful: the one plan is pitched on a high plane of austerity, and demands no little courage, sacrifice, and repression; the other, of homelier complexion—and, it may be, of more lasting charm—is replete with rich colours and low tones: it allows a wider scope for personal idiosyncrasies, is more catholic, and, on the whole, much easier to live with.

Should the inspiration of the moment dictate to you a command for walls light in colour, you must not, having once put your hand to the plough, entertain any idea of looking back. That would be to ruin all. A fastidious chastity of form and site must be the order of the day; your pieces of furniture, very refined, very fit, and very few, are to be disposed here and there after anxious premeditation and earnest thought. They must correspond in their design with the spirit of the wall-papers, or the panelling, and be placed just there (and in no other position than that) where they will tell the most effectively as patches of a darker tone; or you may choose to set the whole—walls, chairs, tables, and all—in a high key; only remembering that if this be done you must keep just as tight a rein over your fancy as though the plenishing were of dark wood. A severe elegance, scrupulously maintained and consistently carried out in every particular, is the main characteristic of this method; the colour chord, limited though it be, will have an austere sweetness that falls in well with some temperaments, but a jarring note were disastrous.

It will be something in the nature of a domestic tyranny that you thus establish. Are you a collector, you cannot bring home a new vase, a picture, a fresh acquisition of any sort that promises





A FIRST EMPIRE ROOM, DESIGNED BY T. HOPE, 1807.



the remotest chance of upsetting the reigning scheme. A book with a gay cover, a time-table, a newspaper, a magazine, each and all of these blameless commodities might create a revolution in this little world, where things go wrong so easily. A displaced chair or table, a settee drawn up to the hearth, away from its accustomed niche, would work havoc on the general effect, which, to be sure, seeing that it is so easily disturbed, may not be altogether worth the sacrifices it demands. It is possible to tire of pedantic perfection, even in decorative art, such as many an elegant First Empire scheme aspired to, and to sigh for something touched with less asceticism and a broader proportion of comfort. With low-toned walls and ceilings all things are possible ; it is not only less difficult to make a room thus arrayed look well, but there is also small doubt as to which result, when completed, is more to be preferred.

A rich, deep-hued background (always provided it be good in colour), besides its soothing composure, offers unquestionable advantages ; it is becoming in the extreme to every object that may be placed against it, whether human or the work of the cabinet-maker, as any who has noticed a group of figures beside a hedge of clipped yew or ilex can bear witness. There is no merciless silhouetting, no hard-and-fast definition ; now and again the outline is lost and intermingled in a pleasant dusk, that nevertheless has nothing of gloom, because the colours, though sombre, are pure and mellow, and the design, what you may see of it, graceful, and compacted of well-chosen forms. Again, your low-toned background gives a so much ampler scope for variety and quantity in the furniture whose attractions it is to enhance ;

a light-coloured chamber must, as we have said, be sparsely and warily plenished, while in the former case, so long as over-crowding is avoided, it is possible, and even desirable, to be generous.

Few errors are commoner and more likely to engender a quick and lively sense of remorse than the careless or over-hasty choice of wall-coverings; and yet, while the most earnest consideration is frequently bestowed upon the selection of a gown, the purchase of a dog, the entering upon a betrothal—all matters of importance in their way—scarce a tithe of such deliberation is given by the large majority to the inner development of the houses in which they are to live and move and have their being. Generally speaking, the person about to “decorate” a fresh abode is the sport of chance, of any random impulse or ephemeral fad. Blown by every wind of doctrine, a prey to conflicting passions for various modes and periods, the amateur whom undisciplined decorative predilections have hurried astray has much, and often, to regret. Should you stoop to such folly your walls are sure to bear mute witness against you from your rising up to your down-lying. “Sleepless with cold, commemorative eyes,” the peacock frieze in unblest union with the realistic flowery wall-paper stares mute reproach at you so long as it, and you, may endure. If you can afford to do so, you will, after a certain while—fluctuating according to individual temperament and the exigencies of the moment—send for the workmen to arise and unbuild it again; but if, on the other hand, you are lacking in means, or in Napoleonic decision, there is nothing for it but to “bulge along” like Brer Rabbit, and bear the consequences as best you may. Your albatross will hang heavy round your neck; and all the heavier

that it was your own crossbow that burdened you with the unlovely fardel.

The writhing, bastard-Renaissance design that charmed so unwisely with its morbid tones and affected repeats, loses by custom and exhibition in the mass those artificial graces wherewith it ensnared you. Even some of the really fine conventionalizations of flowers, if too self-assertive and elaborate, fail signally to fulfil the first law of their being—that of providing an adequate and fitting background to furniture, pictures, faces, to all, in fine, that a room may contain. There is hardly a sin in the decorative calender of crime that were impossible to an ill-conceived or foolishly-designed wall-paper. And the “new-invented game” can rove, perhaps, still more hopelessly off the rails, it can be played in even more detestably vicious taste, than the early Victorian.

The tawdry—and, not so very long since, inevitable—white and gold atrocity which once reduced every respectable drawing-room to the decorative level of a painted sepulchre; the red, or green, flock, stuffy and depressing as the rep curtains draped against it, that disfigured the average dining-room; the blowsy, brightly-coloured and yet dismal-looking floral papers that made our sleeping-chambers as so many howling wildernesses—they have gone red-handed to their last account with all their sins unshriven, and thus have merely met with their deserts; and yet—and yet—were they so very much more condemnable than many an “art” wall-paper that is the apple of its owner’s eye to-day? In all honesty—no. For there is nothing quite so repulsive as the degradation of a fine tradition, the garbled version of something that has once been good; just as an ape is displeasing in its horrid likeness to a man; precisely

as a cast from an out-worn mould caricatures the beauties of the classic features it was meant to emulate; even as the mincing modern poetaster of "the pap and daisy school" (as Mr. Hardy has it) almost makes you turn for the moment with revulsion from Keats and Herrick: in like manner the pitiful *pasticcios* of fitly and decoratively conventionalized forms, and sombrely harmonized chords of colour, throw a sort of temporary discredit upon their estimable models.

Imitation may be the sincerest form of flattery; it is often, none the less, the most disgusting; as witness the debased outlines, the muddy tints, that go to make up many and many a popular wall-paper. Unhappily, the same movement that dethroned the bloated commonplaces of the day before yesterday has given birth to more monstrosities, human and inanimate, than you may care to count. The decadent, the "art-square," the symbolist, the hand-painted looking-glass, bedizened by distorted simulacra of iris and Mary-lily; the "art" colours which simulate the hues of corruption, the "art" wall-paper with its misbegotten sunflowers and poppies, its inane sham-mediæval dicky-birds intermixed with geometrical patternings, its livid complexion, now sour, now sallow, but ever revolting, they are all in the same tale. To be sure, they have mainly ebbed out to the suburbs, but that is only so much the worse for the suburbs, and for the æsthetic development of the myriads of admirable persons who reside therein. It is to be hoped, and expected, that the next turn of the wheel may disperse the whole sorry company to their own place—the more or less decent obscurity of minor anthologies and cheap lodging-houses.

And, if the imitation be vile, it must be confessed that the original owns certain aspects that are not

entirely and invariably delightful. That school of mural decoration for which the designs of Mr. William Morris may be taken as the leading type, falls, despite its obvious (sometimes a little too obvious) virtues, into the common error of considering wall-paper as an independent system of decoration in itself, instead of as a portion of the general scheme, a background, as we have just said, for the contents of the chamber whose nakedness it is to cover. Now, if you elect to remain satisfied with your wall-paper as the sole adornment for your walls, then you can hardly do better than make a choice among the many excellent examples proffered. And of these there is a multiplicity; indeed, it would almost seem as though the art of designing wall-papers had reached its highest development. It is, nevertheless, in all true essentials, a superfluity; you "wonder what it was begun for." To heap pattern on pattern, design over design, were too crass an error for serious criticism; and this is precisely the transgression into which the elaborate fascinations of these pretty papers seek to lure you.

If for their sake you are content to forego the pleasures of decorating your rooms with pictures and china—both of which commodities, to be of any worth at all, must appeal to your senses primarily as patterns—why then, well and good; procure the design that happens to be most to your taste, and settle down to enjoy it; only remembering that having once enthroned so elaborate a work of art, it will brook no rival near. To hang pictures or ornaments of any kind upon it were to discredit both, and to establish a contention for supremacy as undecorative as undesirable. And surely, no wall-paper, however good, can be good enough to compensate for the banishment of its betters; the very character of it, the material, its



position in the scheme of things decorative, forbid that it should suffice alone ; and therefore the most worthy are the most unobtrusive. They may be as rich as you please—the gold (ranging from palest gilt to copper) Japanese leather paper gives proof enough of that ; but simplicity, and that not the bold, bleak, self-conscious archaism that passes muster so often in its stead, but true simplicity, chaste, sober, and dignified, must still remain, as in so much else, the basis of being, the foundation for all the other virtues.

And to attain to this perfection of simplicity demands an even subtler skill than does the weaving of an intricate device and solving the problem of repetition. You must have courage, but not foolhardiness, a very fine sense of selection and space, and a fixed indifference as to whether you shall make a spoon or spoil a horn. The over-excitables, or impatient designer runs a fair chance of spoiling all he touches. Fine stripes, placed close together at regular intervals, with corresponding blank spaces left between, are capable of much that is good ; so is a warm, purely-coloured ground powdered with conventional shapes. An excellent example of the latter is a rich Venetian-red paper besprent with dim golden lions, rampant, heraldic, but unassertive in the extreme for all that. Again, it is pleasant to see that some delightful designs of the early years of this century are being revived—dainty arrangements of flowers, stripes, and ribbons, unambitious, eminently unpiCTORIAL, and absolutely charming as backgrounds in their appropriate rooms.

Brown paper should be the prop and stay of the economical, and, indeed, failing the two ideal wall-coverings—panelling and tapestry—there are few better than this friend in need, if sympathetically

seconded by a really good frieze and well-moulded picture-rail.

Every now and again (but fortunately seldom) you are brought to realize fully and newly the great decorative darkness from which the taste of to-day, for all its faults and excrescences, is gradually emerging; or, as it might be more accurately said, reverting—turning backward to simpler schemes and finer principles. You may chance upon a beautiful old Georgian house infested by latter-day Vandals who have not hesitated—nay, who have even delighted—to dishonour its comfortable stateliness with the ordinary trophies of travel, immoderately disfiguring the walls and the floors of it with stuffed beasts and hides, with debased Japanese grotesques, common Chinoiseries, ill-selected spoils of all sorts from the East, representative of everything that is tiresome and obvious in Oriental decoration.

This is a comparatively recent vice; yet hardly less significant than yesterday's hunger and thirst after unrighteousness in another form, that desperate endeavour to achieve a meretricious elegance of effect; and proof of that aspiration, again, is brought home to you afresh, so vividly sometimes as almost to take your breath away for the moment, by the chilly hand-painted saloons still surviving in no small number, both in and around London. Occasionally, it is only fair to confess, these are the despair and the disgust of their unconsenting occupants, such as may be restrained from destroying mural ornament that has cost so much, and is still in such an excellent state of preservation; while to others who incline towards the hand-painting habit themselves, they are still a shameful joy.

Some thirty years ago it was that our shores and our homes were generally invaded by the horde of



enterprising aliens, who conceived the idea of decorating the English drawing-room, then stolidly complacent in its white and golden glories, with sham Renaissance devices—of showing the British householder how the lilies grow on the banks of Italy. Like the “winsome, grinsome grinder” celebrated in modern verse, these compatriots of his would seem to have been endowed with fine powers of persuasion, if you are to judge, that is, by the number of drawing-rooms, suburban and otherwise, within individual ken, where painted baskets of blowsy artificial flowers, meaningless tangles of pink and sky-blue ribbons, obese and anatomically impossible Amorini, disport themselves for ever upon a background much the proverbial colour of London milk. But it is not often that an old house has been thus attacked; the malady is more generally confined to the usual folding-doored front and back drawing-room so dear to the early Victorian architect.

For those who are empowered to choose the very best, without let or hindrance, and who have the wit to choose aright, there are three alternatives, each equally desirable in its way—wood-panelling, old tapestry, and old Spanish or Italian leather, the last being somewhat hard to come by. And of these three wall coverings perhaps the panelling is most to be preferred. Some are so favoured of fortune as to inhabit houses already lined with it from ground-floor to garret, and they are blest indeed; for, painted or polished—but more especially the latter—it forms a faultless background, composed, dignified, and reposeful as heart could wish. If it have not the fantastic suggestiveness of tapestry, it is yet instinct with a poetry of its own, a grave and quiet charm which is the essence of decorative content. The gold and black lacquer

screen, with its "pomegranate trees and things," its strange birds, its mysterious populace ; the tall bureau of amboyna wood, inlaid with urn and shell ; the slender, flower-garlanded satinwood table, the gilt-handled, marble-topped chest of drawers, spreading its sleek sides and swaggering in portly elegance—what better setting might be hoped for these, and such as these, than the dark mirror of polished oak, here giving back a dim reflection so much more beautiful, as all reflections are, than that of mirrors—there appearing as a twilight country of infinite possibilities ?

And what, indeed, that is in any way good may not benefit by such a background, independently of period or style ? Blue china is never seen to such perfect advantage as on this vague relief, too glossy and rich in tone to be sombre, too atmospheric for hardness ; while on low-toned pictures—ever the easiest to live with—you could scarce bestow a better neighbourhood. A great deal of modern panelling is well-proportioned and does honour to modern craftsmanship ; but to ask more of it (unless painted) were manifestly unfair ; the graces of eld are of necessity denied it. No artificial method of staining can be anything but a blunder and a shame ; no new mouldings, reedings, or bevellings can show that almost imperceptible—and yet how subtly pleasing—obtusity of outline brought about by the long lapse of years.

If you are patient and perspicacious—if, at the same time, a chamber panelled with antique oak should chance to be one of your unfulfilled ambitions—it were well to search the country diligently for an old church in process of its restoration—and consequent improvement out of all knowledge—which will of course involve the usual dispewment. And this, though it will be bad, decoratively speak-



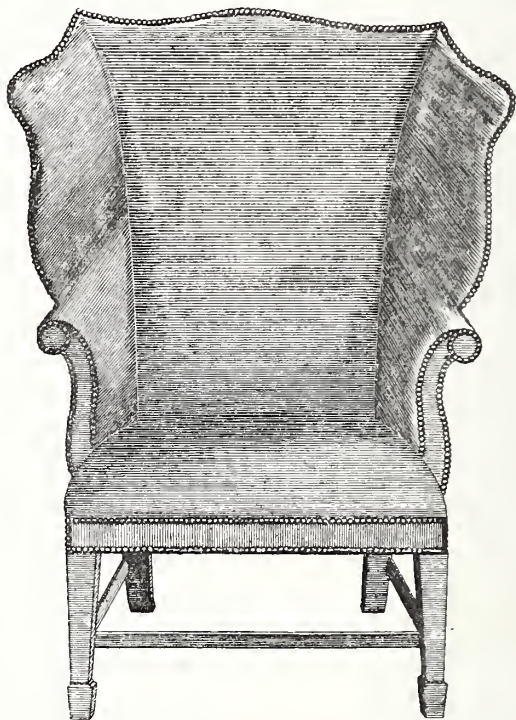


ing, for the sanctuary, will, in the event of your taking an adequate grip of the situation, prove vastly pleasant for you. The panelling of those generous old high pews that once screened the weekly slumbers of the village quality and the diversions of their progeny, is generally extremely good in design and often admirable in colour to boot. It may even yet, moreover, be purchased, if not precisely for an old song, still at a fairly insignificant price. The remoter the parish the cheaper the panelling; but that goes without saying. This, at least, is certain, that such chances—and they are not really rare—seem well worth watching and waiting for, when it is remembered how immeasurably more beautiful is the antique wainscoting than the new, and how infinitely less expensive. Besides, is there not the excitement of the chase?

When a panelled room has been painted the romance of it undergoes a complete change from grave to gay, from dignity to daintiness; and yet the daintiness rightly used need by no means be devoid of dignity. You must cover your chairs and settees with lightly-flowered chintz, or delicately-striped tabouret, and hang old coloured prints after Morland and Romney, delicate water-colour drawings of, or after, early English masters, faded miniatures, or the black cameos of silhouettes—so adorably tender when suggesting a girlish profile—upon the walls. Your furniture, slender and frail in appearance, but strong and well-knit in reality, as all good gear must be, whether stout or slim, should be of a refinement making ever so slightly for austerity, and yet full of graceful lines, and curves not so subtle as to exclude all sense of sweetness. If the room be spacious enough you may even harbour an ear-chair for comfort, an



you will ; but this, although permissible, is not to be greatly desired, unless the bowed claw-and-ball legs, or their severer substitutes, are of the first elegance. In all cases the colour of the walls is to be delicate and yet not sickly, pale, and still with a something of mellowness. There is a combination



AN EARED ARMCHAIR, BY HOPPLEWHITE.

of soft salmon pink, "picked out," to use the common phrase, with dim willow-green, that is very comely and reviving ; while certain tones of amber and of apricot are not without their charm.

As for tapestry, most romantic of all hangings, the poetry, as it were, of mural decoration, at its best you could hardly over praise it ; and here

from best to worst there is but a single step, although that is a long one. The modern Morrisian and the Jacobean are both equally to be condemned, as failing most essentially in all the qualities that go to make up a desirable wall-covering. The figures force themselves upon you, they are always with you, in decided patterning, importunate anecdote, insistent, and demonstrative. They press uninvited into the world you live in, for world of their own they have none; the twilight borderland of the older arras, peopled by a phantom folk whom you may beckon forth from the shadows and dismiss again at will, is all unknown of these. Old tapestries are such stuff as dreams are made of, and they are peopled by the "forms that sweep the melancholy ways of sleep." They may be enchanted forests with woven mysteries of grey and green, and the ghostly hunt sweeping through; or dim chambers in lordly palaces, where forms as vaguely fair as the conceptions of Matthys Maris, or Monticelli move to and fro; or unearthly meadows trodden by no earthly visitants. Again—if you are not in the mood—they may be nothing more than harmonies in low, rich tones, and mistily beautiful colours—the beau ideal of backgrounds.



## CHAPTER II.

### THE HALL.

ONE of the saddest and most significant features of modern villadom is the disappearance of the hall—or, rather, to be more exact, the degeneration of that comfortable heirloom of immemorial homes into the linoleumed limits of the dark and stuffy “passage,” more often than not made darker and stuffier still, in so-called artistic households, with unnecessary *portières*, heavy with the smell of cooking and dingy with dust. In houses of the meaner kind, huddled together in their hundreds, adown long, unlovely streets, the tyranny of limited space explains and—so far as sheer helpless, hopeless ugliness may be excused—extenuates all; but as regards multitudes of latter-day dwellings, even though arranged in the tiresome yet necessary sequence of street, terrace, and square, there is no such justification for the sacrifice.

To ill-judged ideas of comfort and symmetry must be attributed this characteristically Victorian practice of enlarging the living-rooms at the expense of the hall. For the sake of a few additional feet, which, in any tolerably spacious house would be of but light importance, to this room or that, are abandoned the whole beauty and seemliness of the entry. Surely a poor exchange, for looks and for comfort alike, insomuch as, although

no one, save, perhaps, poets imbued with the much-admired Celtic spirit, can hope now to "enter in by the ancient way, through an ivory gate and golden," it cannot reasonably be denied that the keynote, as it were, of a house should be struck, and in no uncertain wise either, by its main entrance and egress.

To inhabit a practically fitted-up box, between which and the traditional doll's house there is little difference except in staircases and size, has been, and is yet, the lot of the majority; for, generally speaking, the dignity of the dwelling departed with the last remains of the hall. It is not, of course, to be supposed that the ancient uses of this once all-important portion of the domicile are now possible, or, indeed, altogether desirable. The conditions of modern life forbid the fearless old fashion and the Gargantuan repasts. And fine as are the great oak-panelled halls still to be found here and there in town and country to boot, with their majestic proportions and minstrels' galleries—such halls, for example, as that in the Charterhouse—they are obviously more to be admired as splendid instances, much on the same lines as a chimney sweeper may admire a princess, or a cat look at a king, than to be coveted by those whose desires and means are moderate, and whose everyday habit is shaped in harmony with that state of life to which it has pleased God to call far the greater number of us. Very beautiful are some of these majestic survivals of an earlier and more decorative day, and notably the spacious entrance-hall at Hardwick, the poetry of whose dark walls and romantically proportioned expanse eludes mere categorical description, and shall, here, at least, escape the desecration of the antique-properties rhapsodist who has gone near,

in Christmas numbers and bad novels innumerable, to taint the atmosphere of so many fair things and cherished associations. So near, indeed, as to beget a bald and wellnigh silent reserve in such as entertain a sincere esteem for whatever of picturesque has been spared to us from the past. Certainly it is matter for marvel and regret that *les échos du temps passé* should have been the cause of more bad work, both pictorial and printed, than any other source of inspiration. But that is by the way.

It were folly to bewail the baronial hall, and just as futile to deplore the funeste little tunnel that wrongfully usurps the title. And yet one cannot but wonder how so discomfortable and extreme a change was brought about. How—to say nothing of the pictorial aspect—were it possible to welcome the coming, speed the parting guest—or, still more embarrassing a situation, guests—when danger presses of being impaled on the umbrella-stand or entangled with the hat-rack; how, on the other hand, to make your farewells with any degree of grace or seemliness when issuing from that narrow vale? And only too often the case, structurally irremediable as it is, is aggravated by a misguided desire to beautify, with the result of still further cumbering the already too restricted ground, and of beckoning the attention to its uncomeliness.

Ugliness needs no emphasis, and to expend elaborate ornament upon the average modern “hall” is to waste money and ingenuity. Still, with judicious treatment, there are distinct potentialities of amelioration. Such a passage came within measurable distance of attractiveness when decorated in two flat tints of rich blue, the deeper something like lapis-lazuli, forming the dado, and

crowned with a simple wooden moulding of the same hue. On the colder tint which clothes the upper portion of the wall hang, not too close together, colour prints by Outamaro, Kiyo Sai, and other Japanese artists, framed with a flat and narrow moulding of gilded oak. A plain dark oak chest, far too narrow in proportion to its height to suit any other position, stands against the wall; a tall slender jar of old blue and white pottery, very substantial of build, holds sticks and umbrellas, while hats and coats may depend in safety from a row of thick antique brass pegs with scutcheons screwed into an oblong piece of old oak panelling—spoil from a dismantled church—fixed firmly upon the wall at a convenient height. The floor is covered from wall to wall with dull amber-coloured Indian matting upon which lies a series of long and very narrow Oriental rugs, whose dim tones repeat those of the colour prints and of the walls.

Another passage was rendered more than tolerable by wall-decoration in flat tints of dusky but pure willow-greens, which furnish a befitting background for a set of old coloured engravings after Morland and Romney. Upon a small oblong table of darkest rosewood, with claw-and-ball feet, stands a Worcester bowl, painted with garlands and filled with flowers. The inevitable hat-rack and umbrella-stand, in rosewood, of absolutely simple and unobtrusive design, shrink modestly back against the wall, and the floor is carpeted with plain, dusky-green pile a little lower in tone than the paint.

Always uncomely, and altogether to be banished from a small gangway, is the clumsy conventional hall table, for all the world like a belated wash-hand stand, that was wont to exist unbeauti-

fully in the majority of homes, vaguely suggestive of British domesticity in the manner of Leech and Anthony Trollope. For this, wanting aught better, it were no harm to substitute a narrow Napoleonic console table, with grey or yellow marble top and curved gilt and carven legs.

But, perhaps, the very worst of all hall plenishings are those modern mock-heroics in oak, coarsely carved in uncouth designs, stained with a peculiarly unpleasing dye to imitate the archaism and the glossy depth of tone of the antique models they so grossly caricature. And the pity of it is they are exceedingly popular—as popular as the equally vulgar hall lamps glazed with a tawdry travesty of what some salesmen's catalogues are pleased to call "cathedral glass."

Speaking generally with regard to the hall and its gear, it cannot too consistently be borne in mind that a certain sober quietness, hushed, so to speak, and almost verging on solemnity, should pervade the whole scheme of decoration. Even in those houses of comparatively recent erection where the hall is, as it should be, square and roomy, the furnishing ought not to include any such modern frivolities as basket-chairs, however draped and padded, trivial little tea-tables, or flighty knick-knacks of any kind. Though it may be used more or less as an anteroom, the character of its contents should show a due degree of dignity and reticence—by no means incompatible with comfort—as befits a chamber, to some extent, of ceremonial. Other rooms may unbend to be intimate at will, but the hall, like a courtier of the *ancien régime*, must preserve a stately suavity.

The serene old-world beauty exemplified in some seventeenth and eighteenth-century houses of modest pretension that may still be found,

principally, perhaps, in Westminster and various outlying suburbs, and often also in old country towns, produces its strongest impression when first the heavy street door is opened, and you step into a cool, wainscoted space, suggestive of uncramped ease and leisurely well-being, paved, in all likelihood, with large diamonds, alternate black and white, of stone or marble, like a Dutch interior, or floored with dark shining wood. The charm is indisputable, the atmosphere strangely full of sentiment that simulates memory, even though you may never have crossed the threshold before; and if there should chance to be an ultimate vista of a small-paned window with the glimpse of a long strip of green garden beyond, the effect will have been perfect after its kind. Nor in winter, when the gleaming woodwork gives back the glow from the hearth, is there less to please.



## CHAPTER III.

### WINDOWS AND WINDOW-FLOWERS.

A casement high and triple-arch'd there was,  
All garlanded with carven imageries  
Of fruits, and flowers, and bunches of knot-grass,  
And diamonded with panes of quaint device,  
Innumerable of stains and splendid dyes,  
As are the tiger-moth's deep-damask'd wings ;  
And in the midst 'mong thousand heraldries,  
And twilight saints, and dim emblazonings,  
A shielded scutcheon blush'd with blood of queens and  
kings.

Not for us such splendours ; they are as remote and unattainable as the " magic casements, opening on the foam of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn," and certainly the jewelled glories of Madeline's chamber window were considerably out of place in the desirable family residence of to-day, or, indeed, in any conceivable human habitation. Stained glass and carven imageries of stone belong to another and a better period than ours—to the golden age of romance, that *bon vieux temps* that never was and never will be. The modern conception of stains and splendid dyes as applied to windows is now most often materialized as a kind of mongrel frieze, in frosted bottle-glass of divers unpleasing colours, that crowns the larger casements of some " art " houses with what Edward Lear has described as a serene and sickly suavity, known only to the truly virtuous. But even that



effect is better than the strangely odious practice much in vogue some thirty years since of filling or bordering a staircase window with alternate oblongs of orange and blue glass. Such windows had a horrible fascination for the childish mind. It attracted while it repelled to behold the outer world now under an unspeakably dreary wintry glamour of blue, and now through a different, but equally unlovely, sallow tinge. You could not choose but loiter and look—enticing others, when possible, to do likewise—always, however, with the same dismal sensations, the same sense of having yielded to an unhallowed curiosity.

There are few (decorative) things more suggestively beautiful than stained glass, but the sentiment of it is not sympathetic with the sentiment of modern life or of domesticity. Could you build yourself a lordly pleasure house with one chamber given over especially to romance—it might be a library or a music room, but were better perhaps with no definite *métier* at all—it should be lighted by tall stained glass casements, but both design and colour, twilight saints, and dim emblazonings, must, like the undutiful daughter's varied gifts to her soldier sweetheart, be of the very, very best. Unless of the first excellence, the most absolutely refined richness of tone and purity of pattern, your desired Aladdin's lattice will be of all failures the most miserable, of all disenchantments the completest. Practically speaking, it has, for the present, no place or part in house decoration, which seems fortunate in the extreme when the excruciating, and, of course, inevitable, consequences of its misuse are considered.

In view of their vast importance there is some matter for wonder at the small proportion of intelligent attention that would appear to be be-

stowed upon the subtleties of illumination, whose influence may make or mar a whole room, a whole house, in accordance with their right or wrong employment. They are the Slaves of the Lamp, and will either serve you to a marvel, or turn and rend you, so to speak, as you bring wisdom or indiscretion to bear on their direction. Light should be, yet seldom is, used at least as carefully as colour, which, in its turn, is really the thrall of light. That Poe, who might have made his fortune as a decorator had he so willed it, had a more than common cognizance of this, is made manifest in a passage tinged with absurdity, yet whimsically right, which occurs in that superb fantasy, "*Ligeia*." "*Occupying*," he says, "the whole southern face of the pentagon was the sole window—an immense sheet of unbroken glass from Venice—a single pane, and tinted of a leaden hue, so that the rays of either the sun or moon passing through it fell with a ghastly lustre on the objects within." This item of decoration, if so you can call it, alone would suffice, without the rest of the fantastic scheme, to produce the weird and unpleasing impression aimed at by the author, who goes on to complete the morbid effect of his casement with this final pre-Raphaelitish touch of nightmare. "Over the upper portion of this huge window extended the trellis work of an aged vine, which clambered up the massy walls of the turret."

But apart from the quality of light admitted, the quantity and distribution are—as being less a matter of course—of greater import far. Neither are you nor is your builder likely to harbour an exotic predilection for windows tinted of a leaden or any other undesirable hue; while, on the other hand, it is rare indeed to find, at least in houses of Victorian

design, any but the crudest and most primitive illuminatory arrangements. As a general rule, the average modern window is planned with no regard whatever to the size and shape of the room it is meant to enlighten; as a rule, too, it is very much too large—a mere plate-glassed gap in the wall, laying bare with bald and brutal candour every jot and tittle of detail, every cranny and corner, to the open stare of day, leaving no possible niche for imagination to nest in, no least excuse for any sense of comfort.

One of the very worst and, unhappily, often recurring instances of this gross architectural error is the long, large room, for all the world like a square tunnel, raked ruthlessly fore and aft by a vast flat plate-glass window at either end, reaching very nearly down to the ground, and very nearly up to the ceiling. A gipsy caravan were more comfortable and more comely to boot. In such a room the excellence, or otherwise, of mural ornament and furniture is alike immaterial; you might almost as well hang your garden walls with paper, and there set your gear out to the best of your ability, as try to impart any pictorial charm to chambers so lighted. To be sure, they are the pride and joy of the bourgeois householder, on whose firmly fixed ideals of “all the comforts of a home,” decorative cheeriness included, you might expend years of analytic investigation and arise from the dismal study no wiser assuredly, however deeply depressed.

Too much, even as too little, light may on occasion become the dreariest thing in the world, a veritable weariness to the flesh, as well as a vexation to the spirit; and hence the utter undesirability of the so-called French window, which is, in point of fact, no window, but a glazed door, and thus, in

all but the full flush of summer, absolutely out of harmony with a northern climate. In winter and rough weather, so far at least as the eyes' well-being goes, you might with equal advantage be living either *à la belle étoile* or in a box with a glazed front, like some sensitive live importation from a hotter climate; for the sentiment of shelter and enshrinement, so essential to a house with any legitimate pretensions to beauty, flies out of a French window, whatever wealth of plenishing may come in at the door.

Yet, however infelicitous the structural circumstance, a certain amount of amelioration is usually possible; below, something, if not much, may be done with fluted Liberty silk blinds of rich and sober colouring strained from a rod fixed at the proper height, while a still more radical change can be effected by improvising a sham-antique window-seat across the obnoxious void. Above, improvement is less easy, but well-chosen curtains and blinds have been known to work (comparative) wonders. There comes to mind a certain make of blind, something the colour of sunlight, and patterned over with a device of honeysuckle flowers and leaves which in greyest weather will play the part of an alembic to the day.

No artist of the present century has understood better than Dante Gabriel Rossetti the poetry of the casement, and its province as a frame to the outside world, whether that be garden—and garden for preference it should surely be—landscape, or vista of roofs and roads. The most realizable ideal window nowadays is long and large and low, with many small square panes; it may be a liberal variant of bay or bow, as taste and the exigencies of proportion to the chamber may demand. Very charming were the slightly bombé windows in

vogue about a century or less ago ; but far and away the best worthy of reproduction is that wonderful window in the old wooden-fronted house that once belonged to Sir Peter Pindar. It is a casement behind which Matthys Maris might paint his Fair Ones with the Golden Locks : a veritable gate of dreams, it shares the qualities of an old volkslied or a fairy tale. The charm and the poetry of it are not to be described ; but such as would realize both need fare no further than the South Kensington Museum.

The betrayal of individual taste, good, bad, or indifferent as the case may be—it is more commonly the last—has a wider scope in summer than at any other season ; the time of rash confidences in colour is with us, and there is hardly a house, certainly there is never a street, that does not offer hostages to criticism in the form of window-boxes, of curtains, or of blinds. We give ourselves away recklessly with regard to externals ; our decorative fancies run with a loose rein ; we are flamboyant and unashamed. And nothing is more eloquently indicative of the æsthetic inclinations of the dwellers in a house than the flowers that adorn or disfigure its outside. By their window boxes shall ye know them. Your front door may be bedizened with the most horrid of hues ; your area railings may flaunt it in sickening combinations of chocolate and gold, in repulsive reds, or grim greens ; the whole outer surface of your domicile may be sicklied o'er with the pale cast of some offensive colour, and none of these things shall, necessarily, be counted unto you for transgressions.

Considerations of economy, depraved conceptions of decoration on the part of your predecessor, a lurid fancy of the landlord's, a score of unhappy fortuities, in fine, may have made for unloveliness



in a house's exterior. But there is absolutely no excuse for the owner of an ill-arranged window-box ; and how infinite is the variety of these may be only too amply demonstrated by the briefest of walks or rides through the streets of the town.

Red geraniums, yellow marguerites, and lobelias will form a fellowship as depressing as it is common. Heliotrope and geraniums (why not heliotrope and mignonette ?) are not much happier in effect ; marigolds and magenta stocks unite in making your flesh creep, and—unholiest alliance of all—pink pelargoniums and calceolarias, joined with the almost inevitable lobelia, produce an impression not readily forgotten or forgiven by the rash gazer. These be some of the most flagrant offences against the public taste, we had almost said against public decorum, while, on the other hand, there is a brighter side to the question, a distinctly appreciable improvement, to be observed here and there in the dwellings of the discriminating. At present these better examples are few and far between, while early Victorian misrule rides rampant over street and suburb. Still, the struggle towards simplicity, however belated, has begun. The hideous hotch-potch bouquet, more after the image of some uncomely achievement in culinary art than of flowers, is no longer with us ; it has been cast out, to return no more, and replaced by the graceful simple arrangements that reign in its stead. But, though the disposition of cut flowers is entirely revolutionized, the regeneration of the window-box has been comparatively ignored. And yet the self-same principles apply to all flowers and plants used for decorative purposes ; the best results can only be attained through some exercise of intelligence on the part of the arranger. "God sends meat and the devil sends cooks" is



an adage that might well be paraphrased for the benefit of the average floral decorator of London casements.

Where one kind of blossom, and one only, is used, whatever it may be, the effect can hardly fail, in some sort, to please the sense. A balcony filled to overflowing with white marguerites adds a distinct note of gaiety to the long, unlovely street; a more enterprising scheme exists in a happy luxuriance of nasturtiums, with their flat, cool-looking leaves, ranging from amber to orange and back again. By no means uncomely for this purpose, too, are masses of African marigolds, the broken tints and varied tones whereof save the situation from monotony, while a certain lightness is given by their feathery foliage. So many flowers, extremely beautiful in themselves, are disqualified for window-wear by the manner of their growth, or the too delicate character of their detail; others of an admirable intrinsic fitness are, as a rule, so crassly misused by the florist as to become an abomination to the eye, and a painful memory to boot.

Of these innocent offenders none is more unkindly treated than the aster; and the pity of it is great. Though nothing could be much daintier or more charming than clustered rows of pale purple, or of white, or even rose-coloured asters, the customary combination of purple, pink, and white into one chorus of common discord is a thing to shudder at. A fragrant confusion of large white double stocks and mignonette makes a pleasing, albeit, perhaps, not a particularly effective scheme; and the geranium—another deeply abused plant—can, when unspoiled by vicious juxtaposition, bear no unworthy part in the summer decoration of our house fronts. But here the chief difficulty lies in

the matter of colour, for, with the geranium, many indeed are called, but few, very few, are there that ought to be chosen. Perhaps no flower that grows is capable of producing a greater number of distressing qualities of red: there is the stuffy-looking brick-dust red; and again, the very yellow and torrid vermilion that is, somehow or another, reminiscent of dusty roads and barrel-organs, and stucco suburban villas on a hot afternoon; then there is that red which sickens towards magenta, and this, haply, is "warst of a'."

But, for such as will take the trouble to find it, and to "see they get it," there is a certain velvety blood-red geranium, full of habit, generous of bloom—a red of the Venetian school, as it were—that will amply reward them for the heat and burden of their search, and the tiresome procrastinations of the nurseryman. Much blameless gaiety may be suggested by the noisy but amiable conjunction of scarlet and white geraniums, an arrangement which should especially commend itself to those who entertain a blind aversion for things exotic, and for all that may appear to them to savour of decadent taste: here they may let themselves go without fear and without reproach. A very delicate harmony in pink and green can be constructed with the ivy-leaved geranium, but with this ivy-leaved variety alone, for there are no really refined pinks to be found in the ordinary kind, and a debased sort of *couleur-de-rose* is as insufferable in its way as are stale confectionery and tarnished fripperies.

It seems strange to think that, with regard to indoor plants, our range of selection should be so straitly limited. The ubiquitous aspidistra, the dismal india-rubber plant, the dreary, dreary palm; certain long-familiar ferns of more or less depress-

ing character, these are the green things of living growth, which, with most laudable constancy, but a distinct lack of enterprise, we have chosen to adorn our rooms. And we are so mortally tired of them all—we have been tired of them for so long—that we have not the heart to separate ourselves from their company. There are, of course, plenty of small flowering plants that might with advantage be pressed into service to relieve the tedium of our tables; but the most desirable consummation of all were the discovery of that method—founded, it is said, upon an elaborate system of root compression by means of tight straw bandages—whereby the Japanese produce their exquisite little flower trees, miniature plum trees, cherry trees, magnolias, wistarias—what you will—and thus enjoy them in full blossom with an intimacy that is as complete as it must be delightful.

## CHAPTER IV.

### CONCERNING THE HEARTH.

THE hearthplace, and therefore, as a matter of course, the chimney-piece, is—or should be—the natural centre of a room—the decorative hub, as it were, of each separate community of inanimate objects gathered together with more or less congruity of effect, as the case may be, within the four walls of a chamber. Even in warm weather there is a perceptible inclination to make hearthwards: chairs would seem to turn that way of their own accord, your steps in moments of tedium or abstraction trend thither by blind instinct. Are you restless?—your uneasy *va et vient* is fairly sure to oscillate between fireplace and window, between fireplace and door, but the pause comes ever and again when the hearthrug oasis is reached. The mantelpiece offers itself invitingly to your elbow, the ornaments are there to be fingered musingly, to be shifted or replaced in accordance with your mood. “The mountains look on Marathon, and Marathon looks on the sea,” and the mantelpiece, however it may be fashioned, whether for good or for ill, dominates and overlooks the room it inhabits.

Much, and perhaps not too much, has been said in dispraise of the old familiar arrangement, still to be marked in an occasional seaside lodging-house, and in the drawings of John Leech, of what

has been called the "Railway Directory" period. It was all uncomely in the extreme—the great pier-glass with its plethoric gold frame, engarlanded with dropsical foliage and meaningless mouldings (the unwieldy charms of it sometimes shyly half concealed beneath a veil of yellow tarlatan); the broad marble shelf with its elephantine supports; the ornate clock in the centre, flanked by vases of Bohemian glass, and, maybe, with dangling lustre candlesticks answering to the tread. It was ugly, it was pretentious; but there are some modern developments of the "Art" overmantel that are not so very much better, after all.

Of the two evils—to wit, the house possessed of early Victorian chimney-pieces, and that which rejoices in Lincrusta-Walton and mock Chippendale—the first is, in nine cases out of ten, both simpler and pleasanter to deal with, to say nothing of the question of economy. In the second case there is nothing for it but either to sit down and bear the cross in silence, determined to suffer and be strong, decided to ignore as best you may the gimcrack conceits of ill-planned rails and shelves, of "art" tiles, of panels showing misbegotten Japanese birds and berries on gilded backgrounds—either to do this or take the desperate and extravagant alternative of plucking forth and casting from you. For the worst of it is that here modification is not possible; you may shift, and bedeck, and bedrape as you will, and merely succeed in making matters bad, worse. It is good to let well alone, but how much better the irredeemable.

As for the frank, artless productions of the blameless but essentially bourgeois age, there is something about their very uncouthness and ingenuous substantiality (provided they be sufficiently unadorned) that goes far to conciliate,

may, even to plead for pardon and improvement. It is easy to impart an almost empirical character to a plain marble chimney-piece that is not too viciously proportioned, by the affixture to either plinth thereof of pilasters formed by the two separate halves of an old carved bed-post that has been sawn apart precisely down the middle. A coat or so of paint reconciles the two diverse materials of wood and stone, or wood and composition, as the case may be, and completes the illusion. And thus, without too much trouble or outlay, you can have a chimney-piece that may, without undue enthusiasm, be pronounced entirely presentable and not at all undelightful. Bed-posts, although less common than of old, are yet not hard to come by, and a pair will, of course, if needful, regenerate two mantelpieces.

On the other hand, the unbisected mate is capable of being turned into a distinctly elegant lamp-stand, or, indeed, a stand for anything that will look well viewed from below—a statuette, a bust, an urn of growing plants, or what you will. The carving on these obsolete things of beauty is often so pure in design as to awaken a regret for the stuffy, but picturesque, allurements of the four-poster, to win forgiveness, even, for the catafalque. And whatever the sanitary side of the question may be, from the architectural or decorative point of view, the attractions of that now dis-crowned and discredited couch were undeniable. It had a romance, a dignity of its own, wholly missing from the shining brazen structures of to-day, which must needs charm by the daintiness of their draperies rather than by any stateliness of form. They are airier, they are—one must suppose—more healthful, but they are certainly less decorative.

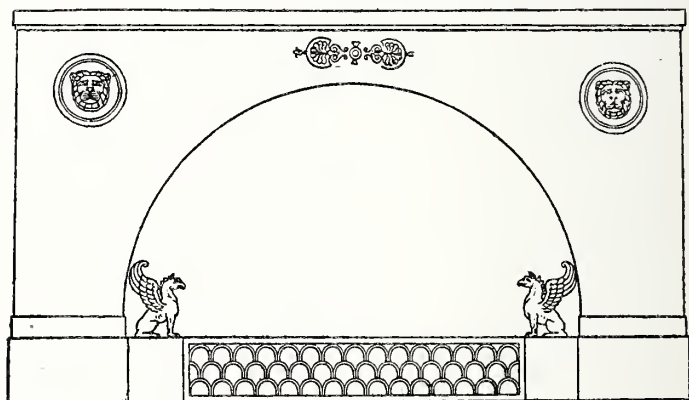


To return, however, to the mantel-shelf, it remains to say that, unless you can be very sure of something absolutely harmonious and good in the way of a superstructure, it is better far to refrain. Above all, to eschew the maddening machine-made arrangements, pitiful in their triviality and lack of purpose, of little shelves and little turned pillars, and little balconies enshrining little bits of looking-glass; often they are ebonized, sometimes they are of the natural wood, hardly ever are they to be encouraged. If you are so happy as to be the tenant of rooms graced with last century chimney-pieces, it is well to bear in mind that mirrors of a contemporary mode are still *zu haben*, and girandoles to mate. And, even if the framing of your fireplaces be beyond redemption, it is always possible to replace it with survivals of a statelier day.

It were inadvisable in this, as in so much else, to emulate the somewhat bleak affectation of austerity of a typical First Empire fireplace, but nothing is easier, if you know where to seek, than to find late eighteenth, or early nineteenth-century chimney-pieces of the most classic and seductive kind, delicately adorned with idyls in miniature, with dances, pastorals, pageants, even with mock-Theocritan sporting subjects; or you may have for the asking, if your taste be cast in less fantastic mould, the like gracious proportions festooned with flowery garlands and knots of ribbon, swung between eyeless ox-skulls, or those elegant devices libelled as "dish-clouts" by George III. And earth hath not anything to show more fair, in the way of chimney-pieces be it understood, than these. They are ideal altars for blue china, for silver or bronze candelabra, for the Chelsea nymph, the Empire clock; while they

nobly fulfil the first duty of their kind by forming a majestic and distinctive *leit-motif* for their neighbouring plenishing, an example for the whole of the house.

And if the best, as too often befalls, be, for one reason or another, beyond reach, there is much to be said on behalf of the merely tolerable. Rather than fly to mantel-board and mantel-curtain—first resource of the unenterprising and the unimaginative—it were well to consider the expediency of



MANTELPiece, BY T. HOPE, 1807.

toleration, of putting novelty and romance aside together, and examining into the intrinsic merits of that which the landlord, or the builder, may have given us. Not seldom, if approached without prejudice, it will be found distinctly bearable; there is a reeded design in marble that has never been justly appreciated, while even some of the much-reviled carved flowers and fruits are possessed of some measure of attraction. They are better, to say the least of it, than inanely-disposed draperies and art tiles.

While for bedroom, or boudoir, a plain painted

wood or slate chimney-piece may be vastly, and legitimately, improved by the judicious use of good Japanese stencils.

If anything might in any measure serve to atone for the departure of summer, it would be the renaissance of the fire as a daily fact, the inevitable autumnal *rapprochement* with the domestic hearth. "If one has not what one likes, one must like what one has," says the old saw, while "Though one door shuts, another will open," is the burden of another; and verily the consolations of a good fire are in no wise to be despised. It is difficult to realize the charms of rose and nightingale when the wind blows more shrewdly than is altogether pleasant, when all the world takes on one uniform greyness of tone, and dry leaves drift about the streets. Then it is that the fireplace, which has for months been even as a dead letter in the household scheme, a shrine religiously screened or curtained, as the case may be, to hide its native barrenness, bursts forth again into new life; no longer a dismal nonentity to be veiled as decently as possible, but a living power in the land, a petty principedom, as it were, with a complexity of dependencies and a little court of satellites all its own.

Fads fail, and modes die, and taste ranges, but the exigences of life remain the same, and it is merely the method of supplying them that shifts and changes in sympathy with the ever-varying influence of the hour. The fireplace, as an immortal need, goes on for ever, let its trappings and appurtenances alter as they may; and it were well—seeing how plainly these are in evidence for the longer part of the year—that some perspicacity should be exercised in their choice, and that they should be of such a kind as to live in harmony one

with the other. Thus a Georgian grate, with its accompanying chimney-piece, mocked by an iron fender of obviously modern mould, and flanked by a coal-scuttle of about the decorative value of a coffin, is a thing to put all Heaven in a rage; moreover, if you should add thereto a hand-painted glass fire-screen you will have set the last touch to as evil a combination as ever cheered a Philistine heart.

On the other hand, it needs but little research and little less discrimination to produce a diametrically opposite effect, making the main centre of your room a place of decorative pleasantness and peace. And, firstly, it may be taken as a general rule that, although new fenders and old fireplaces swear at one another with no uncertain note, a well-designed brass fender with its lawful gear, whether old or new, but old for preference, will look well with any grate or chimney-piece whatsoever. Indeed, the virtues of a brazen fender may scarcely be over-praised; partly, perhaps, because the very best of all—the ideal fender, in fine—handed on to this generation from the last, is fashioned from that genial metal; but also, without doubt, by reason of its peculiar appropriateness of colour and sheen. Steel, so much employed, and so tastelessly wrought, in the early Victorian era, is too cold and unsympathetic in tone to mate well with the sentiment of the hearth; faultily faultless, icily regular, splendidly null, even when polished to the pitch of perfection, it fails of its purpose, stultifying, as far as may be, the visual effect of the ruddiest blaze, and imparting an air of dreary gentility unto the farthestmost outposts of its influence.

Combined with ormolu it is still more deeply to be condemned; for here the eternal note of vul-

garity is not only brought in, but struck again and again with dreadful insistence. And the worst of it all is that this brood of banalities—to which, by the way, belongs also that abhorred fetish of our childhood, the sacred “bright poker”—were fashioned with such infernal strength and solidity as to be capable of resisting centuries of ordinary use. They survive, glittering and unblemished, in the pious care of many a domestic devotee, while the better kind in their hundreds have gone down to the Hades appointed for things outworn.

Yet, even as in other matters, the treatment is more than the material; the uncongenial qualities of steel as a medium for fireside furniture do not forbid the decorator to turn it to good account in spite of them—if he can. And that this was fully possible to eighteenth-century craftsmen we have proof and to spare in the form of fenders, whereof the design of delicate tracery is so decorative, the workmanship so fine, that the fabric is more than forgiven for the sake of the effect. But not many of these charming examples have been allowed to survive. Presumably, rust has corrupted and rough usage or neglect disqualified them for their rightful sphere. Not so, fortunately, with their brazen contemporaries, whose homelier charms have more successfully withstood the ravages of time and change. Of these there is an infinite variety, some being of the first excellence, while none are unworthy a place in the abodes of the (tastefully) righteous. Now it would seem so difficult to make good things in the way of plenishing; then it appears to have been the natural law of decorative conception.

Be that as it may, our forefathers' fenders were beyond compare superior to ours. You have only

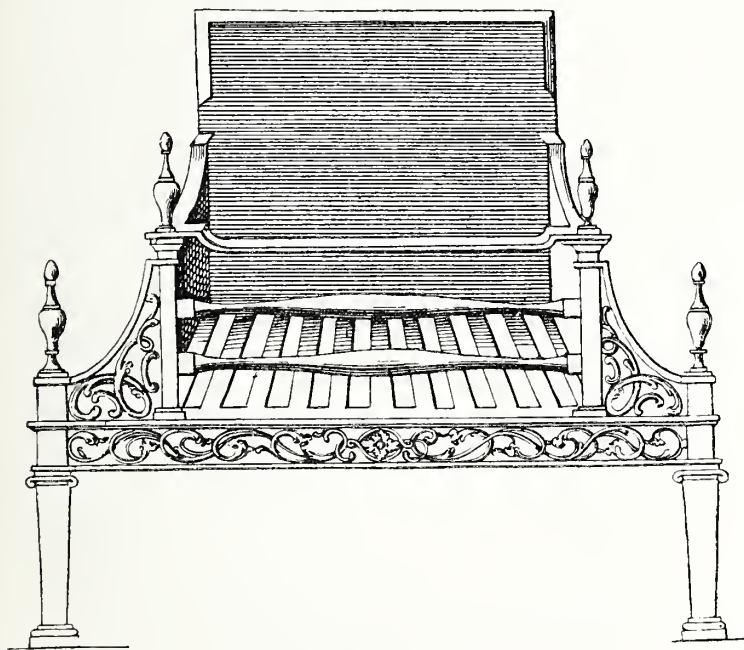


to consider the purposeless agglomeration of posts and rails, foolish knobs, curves that serve no purpose of use or ornament, heraldic fantasies as feeble as incongruous—to say nothing of the wrought-iron horror, needlessly ornate and forbidding with its wealth of scrolls and spikes—that mark the modern hearth-fence, in relation to the countless combinations of elegant form and proportion furnished forth by earlier instances—it is Hyperion to a satyr over again. In antique brass fenders the conventionalization of form was done with unerring taste : leaves and flowers were pressed into service and used conjointly with medallions, mouldings, and other decorative variations of design in absolute artistic harmony ; the traceries were admirably designed, always founded upon lines full of purpose and grace, while those more massive examples, where the dainty filagree work was not employed, charm by their just proportions and their severe elegance of ornament.

The dainty claw feet, common to most, are an additional joy to the eye ; and poker, tongs, and shovel share the same stateliness of character which pervades the whole arrangement. The new brass fender, if it be not a replica of an earlier model, is useful, sometimes tolerable, but never delightful. Perhaps one of the most ill-assorted unions that ever was is the admixture so often seen of ebonized iron and brass ; it is pretentious ; it is funereal ; it is altogether uncomely and condemnable. Better, far better, a bald black iron fender of unobtrusive design than a mongrel commodity where one metal destroys the other. In some cases the plain stone or marble curb has been found a comparatively safe expedient ; and here all depends on the proportion and the character of the modelling, whether it shall make for necropolitan suggestions, or exist,



with some degree of fitness, in its proper capacity. A black marble fender, artistically reeded, has been seen to look not amiss in juxtaposition with a fireplace lined with old blue and white Dutch tiles ; but in white marble the curb is a thing to be avoided, for from its very nature it is apt to be too cheerless of aspect to brave production in any form

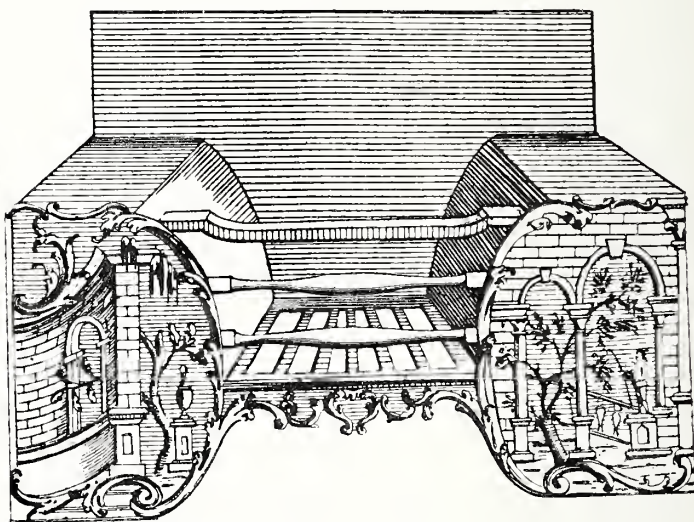


A STOVE GRATE, BY INCE AND MAYHEW.

that should smack of the cemetery. As well engarland your chamber walls and fill your flower vases with white camellias and immortelles as add a fender of white marble to your household gods.

The appearance of comfort is the result most to be aimed at for fireside effects, and this will never be found at variance with true decorative ex-

cellence ; what grate, for instance, could be more attractive, in a modest way, than the old-fashioned hob-stove—the very embodiment of cosiness ? For the more part its ornamentation was in admirable taste ; its structural design a happy combination of homeliness and grace. It is, indeed, to be regretted that so pleasing and sensible a form of fireplace should have all but disappeared from



A BATH STOVE, BY INCE AND MAYHEW.

our midst, discarded in favour of newer and less worthy inventions.

Another piece of fireside gear that has degenerated into various more or less odious forms is the coal-scuttle—the fine old helmet-shaped copper vessel is wellnigh a thing of the past, rarely now to be met with, and promptly to be bought when discovered among the wares of the antique furniture dealer. For the modern pasticcios have as yet failed to rightly reproduce its ancient grace,

and the japanned or brass or polished wooden box that reigns in its stead is a rank abomination, whose best hope is to escape observation as much as possible. Adorned, or unadorned, it is devoid of the remotest decorative merit ; but less offensive when least bedizened.

“Any ornaments for your fire-stoves?” with its interrogatory undulations of tone, is still among the summer street-cries to be heard in remote suburbs and the obscurer quarters of the town. It comes in with the “all a-blowing and a-growing” wares, it goes out with the strawberry, and its nasal, melancholy cadence seems, by the saving grace of old association, an almost pleasing sound, quick with memories of heat and brightness, gay with that nameless atmosphere of free festivity that is the very spirit of summer. And, oddly enough, this same sentimental indulgence extends to the tawdry merchandise itself—for all the world like a cluster of old ball-dresses—flaunted through the streets with all the pomp and circumstance befitting its pretensions to elegance. They are glaringly ridiculous, they are below the uttermost low-water mark of the worst imaginable taste—those foolish, apron-like anarchies of coloured paper and tinsel, besprent with trails of blowsy calico flowers that glitter in the hot sun and flutter in the warm wind. In the words of the lyrist, ’twere lunacy to love them now, and yet perhaps you wave away their meretricious charms with a sneaking, unreasonable fondness that reaches back to childish days and childish attraction towards artificial atrocities. Even now there comes to mind a secret aspiration, a never uttered regret, for an arrangement in white crinkled paper, silver tinsel, and pure white water-lilies with green leaves, that was dangled for five long minutes by its persuasive vendor before un-

appreciative parental eyes—in vain. A veritable idyl it appeared to the powers that were not, and eminently to be desired. But the æsthetics of the nursery and of the drawing-room were at variance on this point, and the symphony in white and silver was ravished away to grace some more poetic home.

Foolish enough, in all conscience, were these flimsy furbelows, once so dear to the early Victorian heart, and yet there is matter for doubt as to whether their ghostly suggestions of ballet-dancers just flown up the chimney, and all their misguided millinery, were—lapse of time and the development of taste being duly considered—so very much more deserving of contempt than many and many a trophy that at the present moment adorns the domestic hearth of many and many a happy housewife, and in all good faith is set down as “so artistic,” and believed in with a warmth of fervour for which beauty and congruity of matter and design might appeal in vain.

The same blind vulgarity of sentiment that flings plucked roses broadcast upon the table-cloth to die while you dine, stands ferns and flowering plants in pots against the black vacuum of a fireless hearth, regardless alike of fitness and of comeliness—marguerites and pink geraniums, hydrangeas and calceolarias—combine with palm and aspidistra to render thrice as cheerless again the cheerless chimney-place of summer. “His boots were on the mantelpiece” sings a latter-day poet concerning a scene of lurid disorder, but “Her flowers were in the fireplace” might seem hardly less suggestive of inappropriate juxtaposition, for the one combination is about as defensible, decoratively speaking, as the other. Yet, indeed, while the boot and mantelpiece arrangement may

present, to say the least of it, the excuse of an impromptu, the my-stove-shall-be-thy-garden scheme is the product of malice aforethought, an outward and visible sign of that strange insensitiveness to differences of kind to which the larger proportion by far of our multitudinous artistic offences are owed.

High also in the category of these should stand the glass hand-painted screen, with its sprawling simulcra of flowers and foliage, wherein coarseness of execution does duty for boldness of design, and weakness of design for the first fine careless rapture of a free and fearless inspiration. And, over and above these, there are unspeakable things in cardboard and basket-work, and heaven knows what beside—dyed outlandish grasses tortured into trophies, ornaments in the semblance of monstrous fans, mimic palettes propped on easels and painted with landscapes of the approved British water-colour school to the uttermost verges of fatuity.

These, and such as these, are, of course, worse ways “to dress up a chimney very fine for the summer time” than the common practice of setting a small Japanese screen, either painted or embroidered, before the dark void: a comparatively inoffensive substitute, although the airy gaieties of loose-petalled blossoms and birds on the wing are there so obviously out of place. Very few and very simple are the alternatives most to be preferred. “Summer’s a pleasant time,” but, during true summer weather, the “cauld hearthstane” must of necessity make somewhat for dreariness; best, therefore, to let it remain as far as possible in seemly abeyance. Like a church where no man comes to pray, like a field reaped and gleaned, is the hearth bereft of its



wonted fires, and the endeavour to deck it out with unnatural smiles is as futile in effect as though you should tie artificial flowers and favours of ribbon to an orchard tree in the depths of December, or go clad in cool sprigged muslins and broad-leaved rose-garlanded head-gear through the yellow gloom of a wintry fog.

The mantelboard and curtains, kindly dissimulators of our ugly latter-day fireplaces with their ill-shapen grates and sickly "art" tiles, are, when good in colour and design, amply sufficient for the occasion. The curtains, drawn closely together, and hanging in simple folds, veil the disused altar with grace and discretion. Much obviously depends upon the material employed, and, while there are many modern fabrics that fulfil their mission worthily and well, the things that are pre-eminently more excellent for this purpose are antique brocades or broideries whose dyes have been harmonized, whose designs are blurred by time, the master-decorator. A more than commonly pleasing example of a temporarily ignored hearth is soberly fair with hangings of old Oriental brocade of that dull yellowish rose loosely specified as "salmon," but for which there is no adequate name, flowered with silver in such dim chastened fashion as to convey no metallic impression whatsoever, but only a hint of vague splendours, rich in retrospective poetry, but void of display. Against this sympathetic background stands an upright ebony panel, simply framed so as to serve on occasion as a fire-screen, and decorated (it is Japanese, of course) with admirable simplicity of effect with a low relief, done in ivory, mother-o'-pearl, and variously coloured precious stones. The subject represented is merely a white, rosy-combed cock and two white hens



exquisitely grouped, and a flowering spray of magnolia ; but the refinement, the fit, and unobtrusive elegance of the whole unpretentious arrangement has a distinction all its own.

If, however, you are so fortunate as to enjoy fire-places and chimney-pieces of eighteenth or early nineteenth-century date, there will, needless to say, be no sheltering draperies to cloud the carven glories of garland and ox-skull, love-knot and neo-classic idyll. Nor will there be the necessity ; for the stove of yesterday was fashioned in such wise as to be sightly both in and out of season ; its charm was adapted to, but not wholly dependent upon, its primary uses, and thus you will want nothing more than a few small logs, with their bark remaining—if some mosses or lichens still cling to them it will be so much the better—to heap in admired confusion and readiness against a cold or a rainy day. And this, it may be, is the best of all “ornaments for your fire-stove.”

## CHAPTER V.

### THE TABLE, THE CHAIR, THE SOFA.

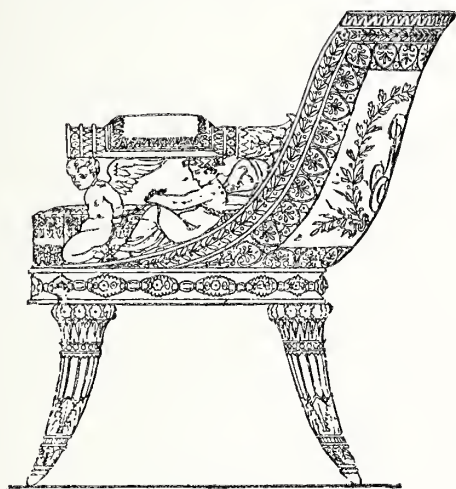
NOTHING is more eloquently characteristic of any given period than its furniture in general, and its tables in particular. And this is hardly to be wondered at, seeing how closely incorporated, as it were, with everyday life is the chattel in question. It almost ceases to be a piece of mere plenishing, and wellnigh takes its place as a personality. The bureau, the buffet, the cabinet, even the chair—highly-esteemed and well-beloved as they may be—belong rather, by comparison, to the rank and file of indispensable household gear; but the table stands “alone, as the nightingale sings.”

Whether to eat or to write, whether to toil or to make merry, you are dependent on the table. Rickety, it is an exasperation; too high, a source of diurnal misery; too low, an offence against every natural law; but, whatever its proportions or disposition, it is always with us, from the time of toffee-making and brick castles to that of the less serious cares and occupations that infest the ordinary day. Once, to lean with your elbows on the table was a forbidden indulgence—one of those darker offences against nursery etiquette (nearly on a par with drinking tea out of your saucer) to be committed recklessly, with the lurid joy of despair, when you were so deep in disgrace that





nothing mattered any more, and the whole world was darkened to your ken. Now, to be sure the pleasures of the deed are less, yet the habit remains, and, in some measure, the associations to boot. Indeed, the "mahogany tree," with all its manifold offshoots and variations, its modes and its memories, is a portion of our daily lives as much a matter of course as the act of living itself; a centre of sociability, a pedestal for pastime, an



A FIRST EMPIRE CHAIR.

enduring platform for work or play, it has developed with human development, grown with human growth, changed with changing times and manners, from grave to gay, from lively to severe, with consistent mutability.

Especially sympathetic with the Zeitgeist of some thirty or forty years since was the furniture thereof; exaggerated domesticity cried aloud from every bulging curve, each thick insensitive shape; no drawing-room was complete without a large clumsy round table, of walnut-wood, and inlaid,

for choice, the nether extremities turned, and carved. The work-table, too, took on a heavier and, at the same time, an absolutely commonplace cast, and was clothed with *bourgeoisie* as with a garment; the "well" beneath, from an



A CHAIR, BY E. LECONTE.

adequate and daintily-formed receptacle, developed into a corpulent, ungainly pouch, whose disproportioned bulk proclaimed, with the domestic ostentation proper to the period, its pretentious virtues. All were in the same tale; it was an age when men and women were past their youth before thirty, and positively elderly at forty;



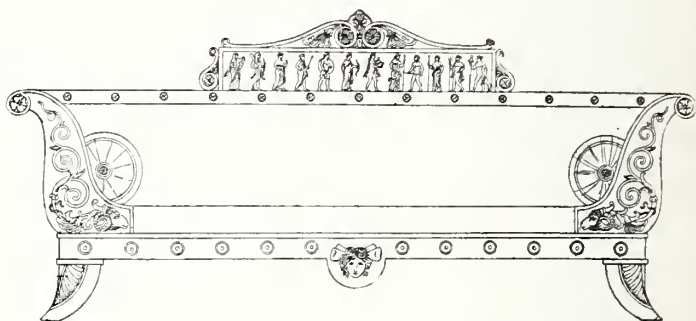
when the marches of middle-age extended over at least two-thirds of existence ; when a girl was an old maid at five-and-twenty.



AN ARMCHAIR, BY E. LECONTE.

The veneered dining-table with its multitudinous leaves and its swollen legs, thick where they should have been slender, attenuated where more generous outlines had served as a means of grace, bears witness in company with the blowsy sofa, the over-

blown "ottoman," the obese sideboard, the amorphous chair, to that utter scorn of selection and refinement in every shape and form which went far to justify the Gallic sneer that dubbed us a nation of shop-keepers. "Gey ill to live wi'" are the conceptions of many a more modern designer, but for sheer depths of depression, of dulness—naked and unashamed—you need fare no farther afield than to a house furnished after the beau ideal of those lonesome latter years. And how charming, how nicely adjusted to each several



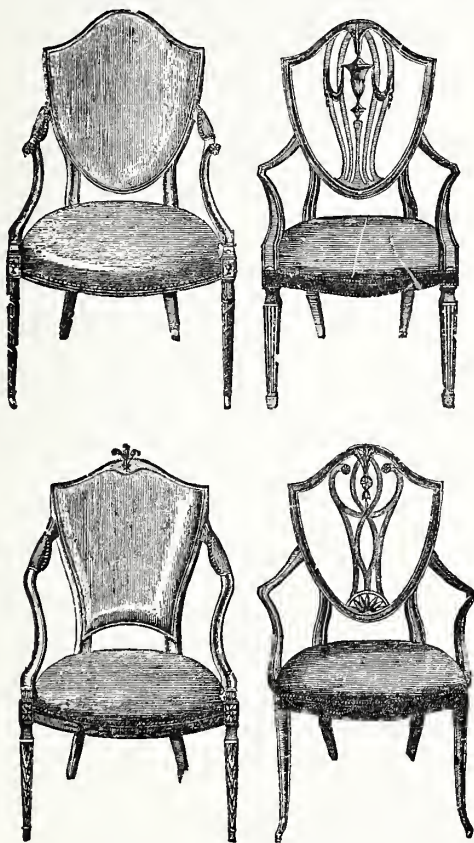
A SETTEE, BY T. HOPE, 1807.

purpose, how "very fair," in the words of a latter-day bard, were the tables of yester-year! To revert even to the work-table, or ever it waxed fat and toppled, what a pretty, an essentially feminine piece of goods it was wont to be! There is one, among other survivors, of glossy amber satinwood, inlaid with darkest rosewood, and shaped with a delightful affectation of austerity; the long, tapering legs are as neat and fine as heart could wish, the lines of the oblong upper platform most elegantly curved, while the well, neither too deep nor too wide, is fluted over with grass-green China silk, soberly cheerful of hue.





Among side-tables of the courtlier kind, those of the Empire, or the Regency, shone, and still shine pre-eminent for beauty of proportion, chastity of ornament, and stateliness of form, far surpassing



CHAIRS, BY HEPPLEWHITE.

in these particular qualities the gayer graces so much reproduced of late that belong to the Louis XV. type. Often they are roofed with marble, often backed with a mirror, always is their ormolu work (when present) of the first excellence. Of rosewood, with a grey marble top, and elaborate



ormolu ornamentations, founded on Renaissance lines, is one admirable exemplar; another of satinwood, cunningly inlaid with diversely coloured garlands and posies, and boasting a white marble top, is no less praiseworthy; while among the many beautiful instances of carved and gilded con-



CHAIR (OLD FRENCH).

soles none is invested with more classic elegance of effect than a certain white and golden harmony, wherein two tall, winged, gold sphinxes, sitting upright on their haunches, support a broad white marble slab.

Of course here the chief beauties lie in the



nobility of the carved figures, and the justly estimated proportion of the whole, and—equally of course—these are just the merits that cannot be defined, but which are a liberal education in themselves. And, to be sure, it was in this very art of proportion, and in the relation of one form to



CHAIR (OLD FRENCH).

another, that the more successful designers of Empire furniture most excelled. They were temperate, they were composed; they were blessed with the power to adorn, and the still rarer faculty for renunciation. Self-conscious with the imperial self-consciousness of a cat, or a Court beauty, their art when truly at its best knew how to assume

the semblance of simplicity and yet avoid baldness ; to reconcile pomp and severity ; sweetness and purity of line with opulence of detail, which is, and has ever been, no common thing.

The ideal table for a small dinner, where the

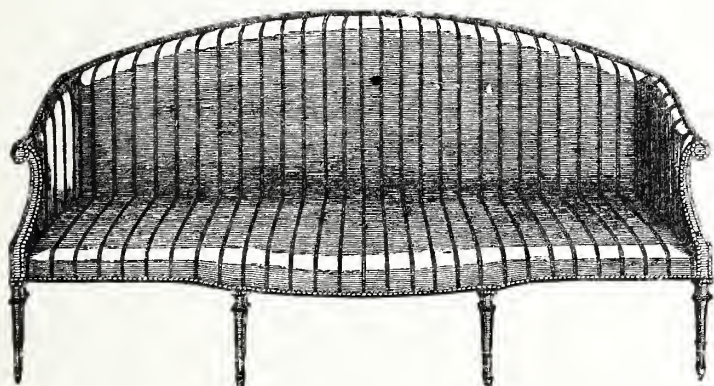


CHAIR (OLD FRENCH).

*convives* are fit but few, is oval in shape, and not too numerously legged ; while the most attractive card-table is either in rosewood, bow-legged with claw-and-ball feet ; or else in amboyna, or satinwood, painted with festive devices of ribbons and garlands, spindle-shanked, but strong with

the strength that is born of faultless joinery, and of that alone.

But it is what is now known as the "occasional" table that varies most—that takes, too, perhaps as prominent a place in our rooms as any of the species, more immediately expressive of the moment's whim than all the rest. The silly little Sutherland table, happily less often seen of late, is, of course, a degenerate descendant of the old gate-table; which latter, by the way, too often escapes the ravages of time only to fall under the defacing



A COUCH, BY A. HEPPLEWHITE.

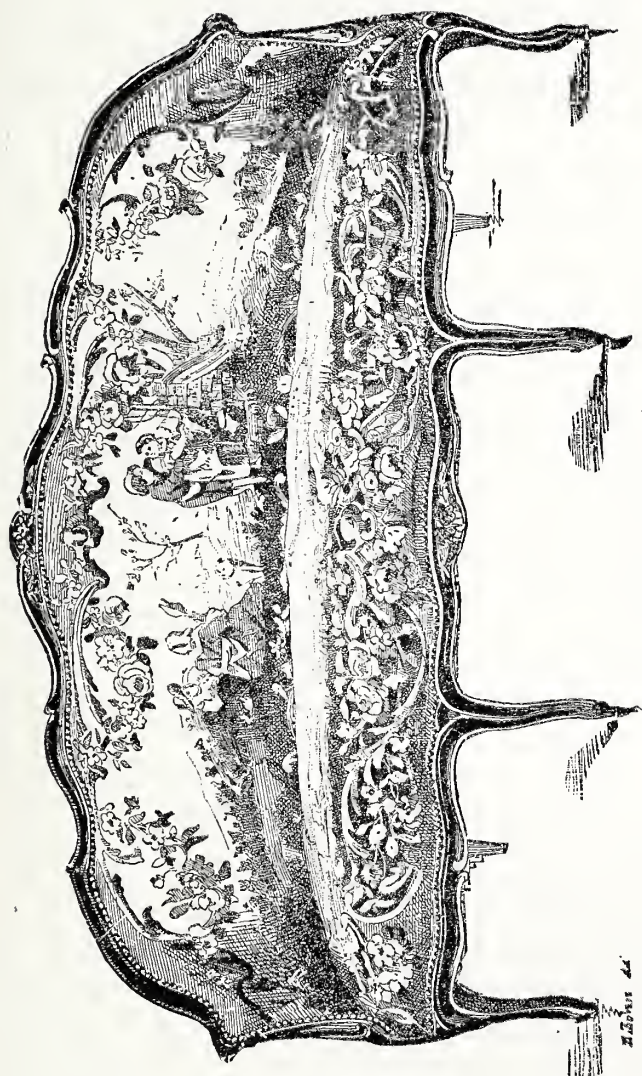
fingers of the enthusiastic decorator, who, fondly imagining he is adding to its value, cannot refrain from covering it with carving—and ignominy. There is something, albeit not much, to be said for the modern octagon tea-table, when it does not blossom too unrestrainedly in nether plateaus and balconies. It is uninteresting, but not vicious. Odious, exceedingly, is the lady decorator's rickety little hand-painted out-put, with its feeble lines, its sticky-looking surface, its coarse, sprawling blossoms; but no less corrupt is a degraded pasticcio of a Louis XV. table, cast, and abominably cast, in

some loathsome matter that simulates a combination of ormolu and steel; while a plaque that is an outrage on the Vernis-Martin tradition is framed in to form the top. Some of the comeliest tea-tables of recent production (setting aside all question of replicas) are the modest oaken kind, stained apple-green, and pleasantly unpretentious in design.

Of Cottier's famous tables—those admirable tables that he bade to be for the express purpose of harmoniously inhabiting rooms devoted to pictures of the Romanticist school—it needs only to say that they fulfil their purpose, than which there can be no higher praise. And the thought of Cottier and his furniture suggests a very present need—a need which none, as yet, has appeared to recognize. Where (and what like?) is the plenishing that remains to be invented to dwell in unity together with impressionist pictures? Every other school of painting has its appropriate kind of furniture; and modern art alone lacks a sympathetic setting. Who will be bold and original enough to undertake the task of designing tables—and the rest—that shall not be put to shame by the works of Whistler, Monet, Degas, and the members of the New English Art Club?

Chairs, like the human units for whose greater convenience they were invented, are wont to exhibit almost innumerable variations of form and character, of type and design: practically speaking, there are no stricter limits to the changes that may be rung on the one frame than on the other; both must obey certain structural laws, conform more or less to certain given principles. But within these wide though inelastic bounds there is room and to spare for multitudinous and complex vagaries; combinations “to bid us smile, to bid us weep,” as

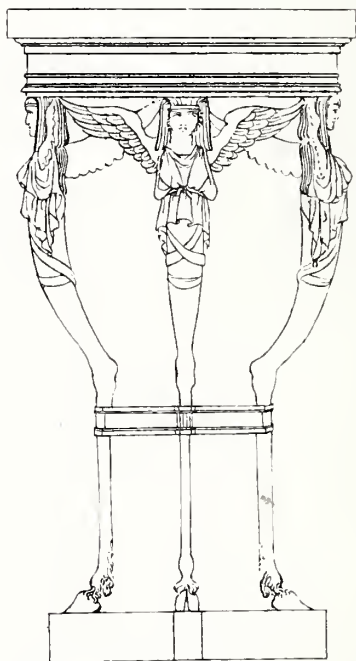




A COUCH (OLD FRENCH).

PLATE 44

the case may be ; some made for honour, others for dishonour, in accordance with the causes that shaped them. A comely, and at the same time a comfortable, chair is one of the noblest works of the cabinet-maker ; but "handsome is as handsome does" is as fallacious a generalization as ever was applied to chairs or to people.

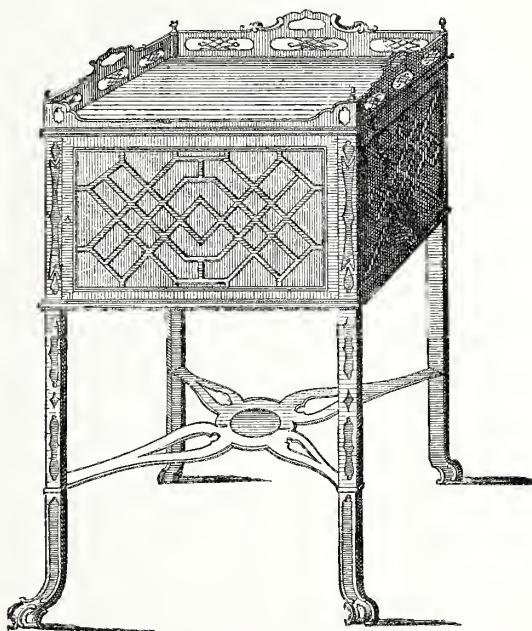


TRIPOD TABLE, BY E. LECONTE.

Some of the most beautiful chairs imaginable insist on an austere formality of pose that tries the patience and the spinal column to boot ; while an abominably ungainly seat, a veritable Caliban of upholstery, will gather you into its embrace with an effect of cordial lovingkindliness that is absolutely irresistible to all but the Stoic or the fanatic, neither of whom are of any account what-



ever in matters such as these. Who is there among us that has not kept a hideous chair—maybe openly, maybe in secret, because of its indulgent hospitality, and found it as difficult to discard as a decrepit pair of slippers or a habit of making quotations? It may be unwieldy, uncouth, ill-shapen in every possible way, but once

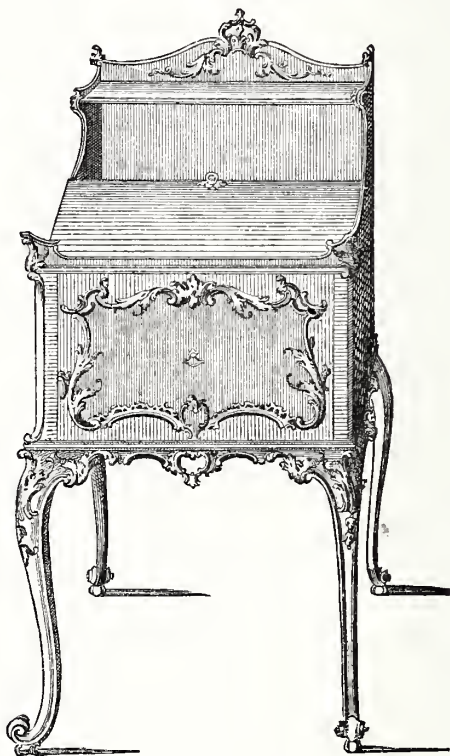


A BEDROOM TABLE, BY INCE AND MAYHEW.

allow yourself to love it, and it will hold you faithful against your will; you will bear with it as with an old acquaintance who offends your sensibilities at every turn, but keeps fast hold on your heart, and mourn for its dissolution or banishment with a sincere, if sentimental, sorrow.

And thus it is above all things undesirable, while the taste is yet unformed, and the æsthetic

senses undeveloped, to flop your young affections on an object which you may have to blush for later—worse, to abide by, until decay or the importunities of a tyrannical family circle divide you. It is, really, not a little odd, seeing how frankly



A BEDROOM TABLE, BY INCE AND MAYHEW.

and freely grace and symmetry are sacrificed in straining after comfort, that an incontestably comfortable seat is so comparatively rare. The "luxurious easy-chair" of fiction, whence the heroine rises, or into which she sinks with perennial grace is far less common in boudoirs than in books.

Given that the evolution of the chair itself is partially the outcome of Occidental austerity, we have laid aside the austerity (and with it a great

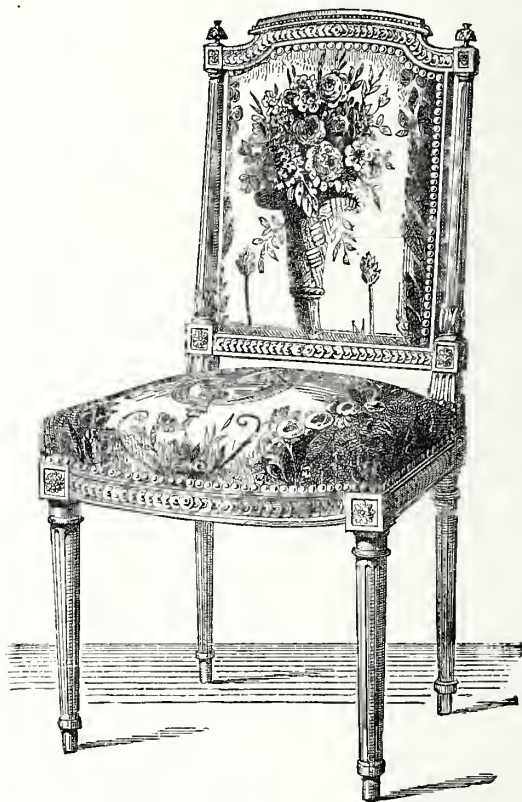


CENTRE TABLE WITH CANDLES, BY SHERATON.

deal of the beauty) without, in at least nine cases out of ten, sounding the depths of real luxury.

Much, of course, depends on the whim of the individual, but the general principle remains the same; and still the wonder grows that some of

the most elaborately designed and costly lounging chairs are surpassed in their very reason of being by the cheap wicker commodity cushioned with common cretonne. Just too low or too high in



A CHAIR COVERED IN TAPESTRY.

the back, too long, or haply too short, in the leg ; with unsympathetic inclines and tiresome protuberances, how eminently uneasy is many and many a vaunted triumph of the upholsterer's art, how fraudulent, how full of insincerity.

There are still not a few who remain under the



deceptive spell of the saddle-bag chair, deluded by its specious assurances of ease and cosiness, and happy to be so deceived; yet, as a matter of fact, that same species has neither ease nor grace nor repose. With arms it is disagreeable enough, without them it is intolerable; under a pretence



A CHAIR (OLD FRENCH).

of expansive geniality it conceals a determination to thrust you off; its stuffy, clinging surface sets the nerves on edge, and makes a change of position a process of extreme discomfort—a seat should never be covered with any adhesive texture—while the back is ever the wrong height for your head. As a rule the modern easy-chair would

seem to have set out with benevolent intentions, and to have repented of them when about half-way through to maturity.

Of the utter abominations flaunting it in plush and brocade along the art-furnishers' shop fronts it were vain to speak; sometimes they will simulate escallop shells and such like things in form, and stale confectionery in colour; sometimes they are squab-like and amorphous, and sometimes freakishly distorted into more or less inappropriate semblances. They are the joy of the suburban drawing-room, and the pride of their progenitors. Nor is the modern Italian chair, as it is sold in England, much less abhorrent in itself; true, it is the pasticcio of a worthy convention, but so garbled and debased in the reproduction—like a Scots ballad told in Cockney prose—as to be rather more distressing than a design corrupt from the first. The spirit of the design is, moreover, out of harmony with the decorative atmosphere proper to an English house, while the workmanship is apt to be uncertain; and the very first and most obvious duties of a chair are strength and stability. These before all; and where are they so amply fulfilled as in the chairs that were made before the blight of forty years syne attacked the arts and crafts of Britain? Thackeray sang, with contemptuous fondness, of a “bandy-legged, high-shouldered, worm-eaten seat, with a creaking old back, and twisted old feet,” and—not to take the lyrist or his subject too seriously—the very features he half disparaged, barring the worm-holes and the creaking, formed, in all likelihood, part of a charmingly graceful structure, which we are fain to imitate to-day. There is, indeed, a new cane-bottomed chair, bandy legs, high shoulders, and all (a replica, of course), whose beauties of curve



and outline are beyond reproach; the lineal descendant, one might well take it, of the fair Fanny's temporary throne that was beloved merely for association's sake. Appreciation of decorative comeliness was then at its very lowest ebb.



A COMFORTABLE ARMCHAIR.

We are on the way to improvement now, inasmuch as we have harked back to old models, models that could scarce be bettered, either from the utilitarian or the æsthetic point of view. We have learned to counterfeit the quaint, the supremely comfortable earchair, with its sheltering

side wings, its sturdy bowed legs and majestic claw-and-ball feet; we follow, not always too intelligently, in the paths of decorative pleasantness and peace pointed out by Chippendale, Sheraton, Hepplewhite, and others of the old school; and the best and the worst of this is, that while the intention is good, and the result, though lacking the finished charm of the originals, not so greatly amiss, it shows forth the barrenness of the land of modern design. Even Mr. Godwin's wonderful artistic intuition seemed in some measure to desert him, and his power of invention to halt, when he attacked a chair design. Here, unhappily, even as in every other branch of domestic decoration, we are immeasurably inferior to our forerunners—the repetition may be tedious, but it is none the less unavoidably true.

There is no blinking the fact that the poorest and least of yesterday's surviving designs are better than the best of to-day's. Perhaps it is fortunate that the large majority of those who go down to shops to plenish are not of this way of thinking; for, in that case, the necessarily very limited supply of old chairs would become even less adequate to the demand than it already is. The greater number rejoice, blamelessly enough, in the dull dining-room chair in light oak or American walnut, with its stupid squareness, its decorous turned legs, curving neither outwards nor inwards, its mean little back, carved (say) with daisies, its meaningless form, innocent of all intention, that naught but weight prevents from toppling over. They are satisfied with this cube-like nonentity, and might haply look upon the wide-seated, shield-backed, wheat-ear chair of dark fine-grained rosewood, or the Sheraton in rich-toned mahogany, with suspicious disfavour; ignoring the graceful, generous





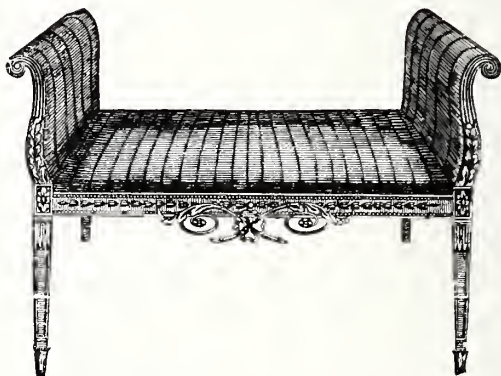
curves of the legs, as important for equilibrium as for comeliness; indifferent alike to perfection of proportion and craftsmanship. As for the drawing-room or "occasional" chair of commerce, perhaps ebonized, with gilt lines, perhaps of the natural wood wrought into divers fatuous forms, and upholstered to match the "suite"—here, again, is room for a revelation. For real Louis Quinze and—airiest and most chastely elegant of all—Empire chairs are monstrously hard to come by; the best of replicas fail to render the spirit of the originals; and the Society of the Arts and Crafts seems somehow to miss the right inspiration—perhaps because of over self-consciousness.

"I sing the sofa," said the poet Cowper, and straightway, after a brief and charmingly erroneous version of its genesis, proceeded to warble about almost every other imaginable thing; of gipsies, the love of life, the effects of satiety, rural scenery, the inconvenience of retired abodes, of "London, the nursery of arts, but not free from corruption," and so forth, with the most engaging inconsequence in the world. But he lived at a privileged period, in a golden age when poets were comparatively few and far between, and thus perhaps deserved more license if they had it not. However that may be, the sofa remains, to all intents and purposes, uneulogized in modern verse; although much in evidence among modern schemes of decoration, which, after all, is perhaps the better part.

Few rooms of any respectable dimensions but are the better for a couch of some kind, if not for actual relaxation of the "languid frame," for the outward and visible sign of that inward and spiritual grace of comfort, lacking which no chamber can achieve true decorative excellence. Indeed, real



comfort and unsightliness can rarely live together ; ugly chairs have been known to be superlatively comfortable, not by any manner of means because of their ugliness, but rather in spite of it, while an ugly sofa is quite another thing ; the farther it recedes from grace of outline so much the more remote is it from convenience. The most uneasy couch that ever wore a cushion is positively the uncomeliest in design that can have existed ; it was generally made of walnut-wood, and its misshapen frame bedizened with little fretful carvings. Its



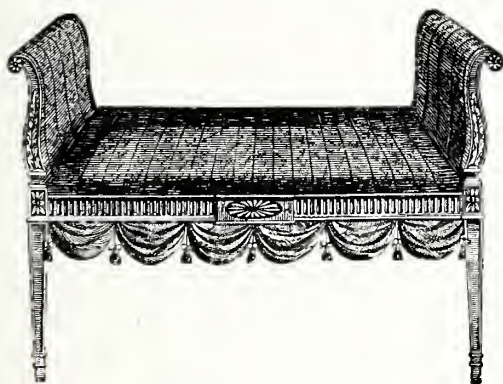
A WINDOW SEAT, BY A. HEPPLEWHITE.

back, which was no back at all, but merely a perverted shoulder, juttet out lopsidedly from a superfluous arm, which also projected in pure fatuity where no arm should be, but where the side should naturally intervene. Impossible, of course, for any but a skilled contortionist to win a moment's respite from fatigue on such a sofa as this, or even to occupy it with the shallowest show of relaxation. Why and because of what it was begun for, rests a mystery in the bosom of its anonymous designer, who must, one is fain to suspect, have been closely connected with the first authors of the Crystal





Palace. Almost equally *gemein* and uncomfortable are the early (and late) Victorian versions of "the accomplished sofa." That strange plethoric movement which corrupted all else in decoration and dress during a certain portion of this century manifested itself as signally in the sofa as elsewhere. The hippopotamus-like form, the dreary buttoned-down upholsteries—now in leather, now in rep, now, worst of all, in ruby or emerald velvet, or in satin; the dropsical turned legs, the foolish undulations of the back as it dwindled unbeautifully less



A WINDOW SEAT, BY A. HEPPLEWHITE.

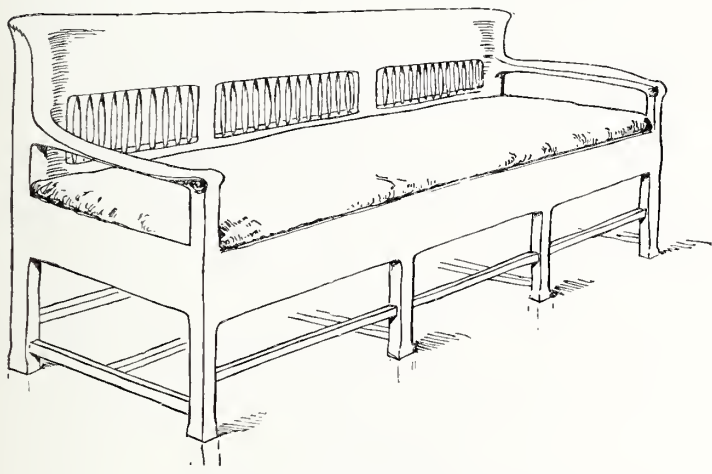
—a little more than midway between head and foot. Its decorative sins were as scarlet, while its only rememberable virtue was its extreme adaptability from the infantile point of view, which was wont, with a little material reinforcement, to see it as a ship, a caravan, a desert island, or a large and fierce wild animal at will. But that is an old song, and one should not be led astray by sentiment. Unhappily, the build of these mutilated, ungainly descendants of a stately race of sofas—the best Empire species, to wit, with the two scroll ends and the gracefully proportioned back—is robust,

and therefore survives, and will continue to survive, its betters, and to cumber whatever chambers may be so misguided as to harbour it. Practically speaking, the polite little Récamier sofa, with its Naiad airs, its classic grace, was worth nothing from the point of view of comfort, and even decoratively was somewhat over insincere and affected for true elegance. It protested too much in fact ; while, again, it were folly to suppose that the fair *précieuses* who were wont to recline on such couches could have found them restful, or, indeed, have regarded them in any other light than as pedestals whereon to pose in the most severely becoming attitudes of the day.

Quite otherwise is the generous couch almost contemporaneously produced, distinctly classic in inspiration, yet, like all good Empire furniture, not slavishly so, but rather commingling an adaptation of noble antique curves and fine mouldings with, comparatively, modern materials. On these the ormolu claw feet, decorative devices of garlands, and other ornaments, are often of exquisite workmanship and charming design, while the character of the carving on the framework is generally as good as need be. Sometimes the back is fluted in two half-scroll-shaped divisions, curving to meet each other in the centre, which, however, is adequately crowned by a carved scallop shell. Then the two ends, each with its small round bolster, take other curves of obviously Greek suggestion, ending in delicate convolutions that gracefully surmount and curl over the firm outward sweep of the reeded legs, which terminate in ormolu lion's claws, and, of, course, the harmless, necessary castor. For the upholstery of these, and such as these, there is no better fabric than tabouret, the narrow stripes whereof, in their dignified, yet not



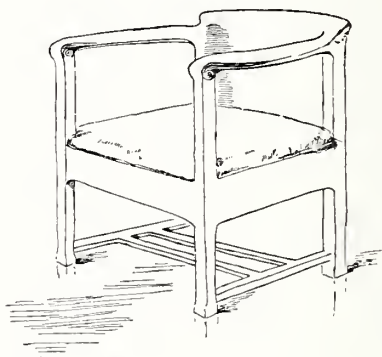
forbidding formality, suit so well with the character of all plenishing of that period. An indirect descendant of the Empire sofa, with the comfort kept, but all the grace left out, is the obese, kindly-natured couch known to modern upholsterers as the Chesterfield. It is about as comely as a gigantic pin-cushion, and as little convenient in a room of moderate dimensions as an elephant; plethoric and protuberant with springs and stuffings,



A MODERN SETTLE (AMERICAN).

it is at best a tiresome piece of goods, decoratively worse than worthless, and not so very easeful after all. The courtly Louis Quinze sofas, gilded, and carved with the rocaille-coquille school of ornament, are still to be had; but, sentiment apart, the modern replicas of these are scarcely less desirable than the originals themselves; while the Anglicized variants in polished rosewood or mahogany of somewhat later date, appeal more forcibly to taste of a chastened cast that would reject gilding in any large quantities, and condemn the wayward caprices

of the rococo, charm they never so daintily. Much might be said in praise of a long, low, early eighteenth-century couch adapted from this tradition, in spite of its rather too slender build, which fits it for untender usage or careless removal; the six slim, tapering legs are beautifully fluted, and the front of the seat, slightly *bombé* in the centre and at the terminals, with corresponding curves between, is finely carved with alternating medallions and reeds; the reeded frame of the back is planned with corresponding undulations, bold yet



AN AMERICAN ARMCHAIR.

gentle, while the arms and terminals are soberly ornate with modified rococo carvings, very admirably wrought. The covering and cushions are of rich dull yellow damask, a little faded, but none the less pleasing for that. It seems a pity that the actual reproduction of English seventeenth-century sofas and settees has not received more attention, for they showed no little nobility of form and offered no mean possibilities of repose.

The last century settee, or courting-chair, as it is more or less ineptly called, has, on the other hand, been reproduced *ad nauseam*, unwisely and

not well, the solidarity of the old models, together with much of their purity of line being absent, and hence the failure, common to so many modern reproductions, to realize an impressive effect. Antique originals should either be copied with Celestial fidelity, or left altogether alone. To-day there is neither the taste nor the time—but especially the taste—for individual variations; when the old tradition is partly adopted, partly evaded, we go even more hopelessly off the rails than when we try to produce banalities that shall be all our own.

A very attractive old cane-seated settee of French make, in gilded wood, has the back adorned with medallions, whereon are painted charmingly artificial little pastorals, entirely in sympathy with the spirit of its design and the period to which it belongs. But the settee tribe is too numerous and too varied for enumeration here, and now. Between the primitive oaken settle to the lyre-backed, spindle-legged whimsy, that brings to mind the Sussex squire's definition of a goose—too much for one, and not enough for two—lie many sorts and sizes; yet none, to some minds, more estimable than the high-backed, bow-legged, double ear-chair, the more especially when the three front legs are carved with escallop shells in high relief, and terminate in claws and balls.

## CHAPTER VI.

THE SCREEN, THE CORNER CUPBOARD, THE CLOCK.

DECORATIVELY, and dramatically to boot, there is no more useful ornamental adjunct than the harmless necessary screen ; no portion of household plenishing more obviously invested with the spirit of romance ; with associations indefinably frivolous, indubitably picturesque. The very name seems vaguely reminiscent of the coquetries of a courtlier day ; an old screen, like an old mirror, suggests memories innumerable, exhales a phantom fragrance of *pot-pourri* and rustling, lavender-scented silks ; of powder and perfumes that have had their mode, and were all the rage at a period when fashion was of less inconstant mood and her creations of a more enduring excellence than now. Had Cowper chosen to celebrate the graces of the screen instead of the somewhat commonplace attractions of the sofa, his epic would surely have been lightened of more than half its tedium, and the literature of trifles appreciably enriched.

The charm of mystery, the fascinations of the undiscovered and the half-concealed, lurk always on the other side of an open screen ; whereto may be added the delightful pretence—a relic, maybe, of childish days—of shut-in-ness (if it be permitted to coin such a word), the fantasy of existing, for the moment, in a little painted world of your own, secure from actualities, where, indeed, an adorable

artificiality is the only truth, and shadow the sole substance. A good screen is a thing to dream over, to weave endless imaginings upon—above all, to possess. Taken from the entirely prosaic standpoint, whether to staunch inopportune currents of air, or to block neighbourly glances of too curious a temper, it is valuable exceedingly—one of those superfluities that it were difficult—and foolish—to go without, while, with regard to the artistic side of the matter, so many are its merits and its possibilities, so infinite its variety, as to place its worth beyond all question. Practically speaking, “no household should be without one,” and, as a matter of fact, few are; although often, for lack of space, or lack of taste, or some other equally cogent reason, the screen is apt to play but a minor part in the domestic cast, sometimes even having its permanent abode in the frigid spare-room regions, or the cloistered gloom of the garret, whence it is summoned merely on emergency, to return as soon as the temporary tyranny be overpast.

“’Tis true, ’tis pity; pity ’tis, ’tis true,” that we give less prominence to and bestow less careful consideration on the placing of the screen to-day than heretofore; in all likelihood because our chambers are, for the most part, cluttered with trivialities, tiny tables, lamp-stands, flower-stands, irresponsibly meandering chairs, to say nothing of that comfortless craze for a floor made patchy and scrappy in appearance, and perilous to tread, by scattered rugs in place of the pleasant continuity of a carpet.

The arrangement of furniture is just as difficult and dangerous an art as landscape gardening, or sonnet-making, and thus it may be easily understood how the judicious (or contrariwise) dis-



position of any important chattel, more especially a screen, will make or mar the whole aspect of a room. You are to consider size, colouring, proportion, each in due measure, bearing well in mind, moreover, the decorative suggestion to be conveyed by what may be immediately beyond. The art of innuendo, the study of implication, are no less subtle where the juxtaposition of inanimate matter is concerned than when words are the components to be juggled with.

Carried to the highest point of development, the arrangement of a chamber corner, or a deep-bowed window-place, nay, even of the apartment as a whole, should prove as worthy an inspiration as certain effects in Nature ; a little lower (say) than a first-class sunset, but decidedly as high or higher than many and many a much-transcribed commonplace of shore or sky. And this is understood by the Japanese as by no other nation under the sun. While next, by the way, in the scale of artistic intelligence, as applied to house decoration, come the Dutch. Nothing can be very much better, æsthetically speaking, than a fine example of a Japanese screen. Nor is this excellence in idea and design a thing to wonder at, given the important place taken by the screen in Niponic home-life. What, indeed, is a Japanese house but an amplification or, rather, a confluence of screens—roofed in and with manifold elaborations it is true, but constructed, all the same, absolutely on the screen system.

And among all the Japanese screens that flood the London shops, it is surprising to find how few are entirely worthless, and scarce one detestable. Of these perhaps the black-grounded, gold-embroidered variety is the least interesting ; for even in the most abandoned and shamelessly made-for-

the-London-market kinds there blossom (involuntarily, as it were) strange charms of colour and design, pretty hints and traces of half-ignored harmonies, all but lost in the attempt at popularity. The sidelong twist of a bird's dainty little body, the device of a flight of cranes or a shower of rosy petals, the tone of a background in relation to the design it is to display, will here and there meet your glance, exonerating, wellnigh redeeming, the cheap screen you had mourned over as additional evidence of the corrupting influences of European taste upon a pure and highly differentiated scheme of art. The worst are not wholly degraded, the best, as we have already said, are good—and very good—the old infinitely finer than the new. Those wrought with the needle in coloured silks on delicately-toned grounds are well enough, in all conscience, whether of the better or the meaner kind; but still the flower of them all is that triumph of the decorator's craft, the painted silken screen; adroitly, and supremely artistically, patterned with figures too various to be enumerated, too subtly suggestive for description.

A goodly portion of their beauty is elusive, and possesses all the charm of evasion. It is possible, of course, to catalogue items, and set them down thus:—Three wild ducks, one swimming in the water, two flying overhead; some spears of dry sedge; some falling flakes of snow; a snow-bound waterside; a grey sky—and still miss all the poetry of the wintry day, wherewith the panel teems, so simply and directly expressed, so satisfying to the imagination. On the neighbouring fold may be merely a few russet leaves eddying languidly down upon a sluggish stream, and yet a perfect epitome of autumn atmosphere. Another panel of another screen has a background of faint blue,

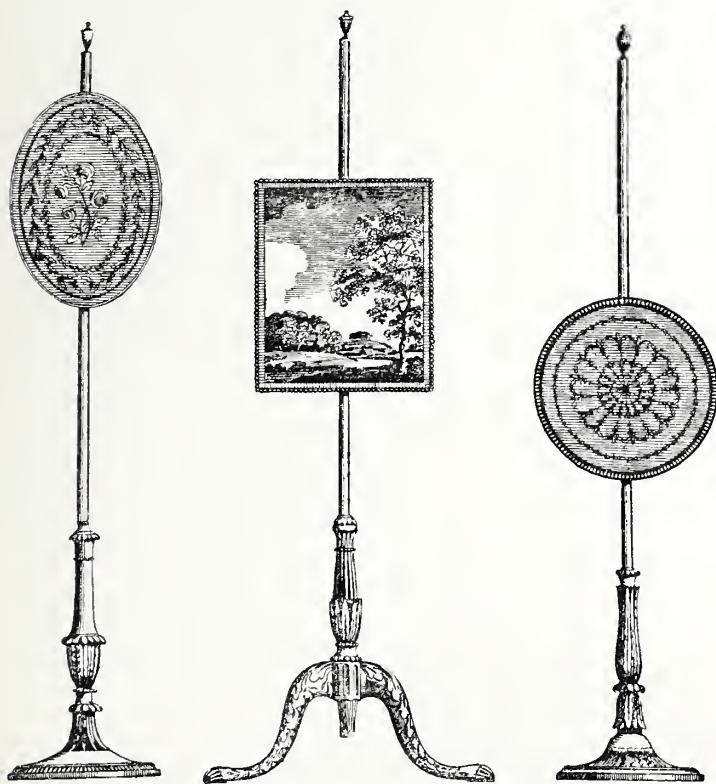
athwart which is flung a slender bough of flowering almond and a flock of spring birds sweeping by with a rush, so that you may almost think to hear their shrill, short cries, and feel the cold sunny breeze.

Romance of vastly different order, but still romance *in excelsis*, attaches to the antique Spanish leather structure, deep-toned as a Rembrandt, full of sombre majesty, and rich, jewel-like harmonies; and here is no lightest whisper of frivolity—Joseph Surface's mythical little French milliner could never have hidden behind one of these,—but tragedy of the statelier kind might well have harboured between the shadowy folds. There has been some attempt of late to reproduce the screen of Spanish leather, but without adequate success, for both dignity of colour and profundity of tone would seem to be lacking in the results. Yet perhaps time will show and the end declare their actual worth.

Most delectable, again, of survivals from those years when the individual charm of each household item was properly borne in mind, is the antique lacquered screen, with its small golden people feasting or wandering among pagodas and weeping willows, and oddly-rigged pleasure-craft, all set forth on a surface black and glossy as a still pool.

The most fatuous, decoratively speaking, of modern screens (yet pleasing enough in its rightful place, the nursery) is that which industrious fingers have been at infinite pains to cover with a motley array of coloured scraps, fitted one into the other with a delightful disregard of perspective, and a maddening ingenuity. There the dreadful Christmas Extra lies down with the Easter Card, and the whole thing is as preposterously inartistic as may be. However, the children take pleasure in its

garish mosaic, and therefore, and thus, it is not entirely to be despised. But there is no such excuse for the foolishness that fills a graceful Louis XV. fourfold frame with glass, bedizened with sprawling "hand-painted" flowers. Glass,



POLE SCREENS BY HEPPLEWHITE.

forsooth! The material, of all others, in direct discord with that sentiment of secrecy which is the very spirit of the screen. Was ever so misbegotten a "derangement of epitaphs?"

The most delightful of new screens is antique in inspiration; it is tall and slenderly proportioned;

each leaf is arched at the summit, and adorned by an idyl according to *le Paradis de Watteau*, on a ground of gilded leather, with something of a Vernis Martin effect.

Corners, like facts, are apt to be stubborn things. In the ordinary square or oblong room there is, as a general rule, at least one too many; and the joiners of to-day, unlike their predecessors of last century, lack the taste, or the time, to give us arched and wainscoted alcoves, with shallow shelves and shell-like ornament, or to dissemble the monotony of an oft-repeated angle by building athwart it a tall, decoratively-panelled press, with double doors on the upper and lower stories, a moulded cornice, and deep triangular shelves. These are often to be found in Georgian houses which the hand of the spoiler has hitherto refrained from stripping of all their old-world graces, and, obviously, when found should be made a note of for purposes of reproduction, as their homely charm is beyond question, while their often very quaint and beautiful lines should furnish forth profitable food for reflection to any intelligent modern decorator. They are worth wildernesses of so-called "cosy corners," and all the other gim-crack devices by means of which so many a would-be picturesque modern chamber is tortured into ridiculous unrest and inglorious discomfort. Indeed, you may take it as a rule that the more a new house blossoms out into fixtures of an avowedly artistic tendency, the more barren is it of beauty and homeliness.

It would seem as though the decorators of last century had heard a voice we cannot hear, so different was their inspiration from our own. So, comparatively speaking, unerring their *flair* for the right proportions of comfort and elegance.



How will the cosy-cornered, overmantelled drawing-room of to-day show some years hence, when its Aspinall'd glories are gone by, when its ill-seasoned wood has shrunk out of all knowledge, and its ramshackle little shelves and peep-holes and posts and rails have fallen into hopeless and premature decrepitude? It is void of both character and distinction, the cardinal virtues of substantiality and simplicity are denied to it. Ornate without splendour—or else, on the other hand, bald in effect, without chastity of design—the average parlour presents a dispiriting combination of flimsiness and ambitious pretence. It is the decorative insincerity of the present day, the simulation of old-world feeling in ornament and furniture that seems to forbid, for the time being at least, any really estimable or spontaneous development. Like the monster in Mrs. Shelley's story, compacted mainly from fragmentary relics of the dead, and endowed with artificial and unnatural vitality, modern decoration, although it has borrowed and incorporated much that was originally good, has no real life of its own, no harmonious entity, no perceptible potentialities in the future.

For almost all the qualities that make indoor life worth living we are driven back to antique gear, or, failing that, to replicas. The decoration, or the disguise, of the corner does not now appear to meet with any serious consideration. The line of the wall is relentlessly pursued round and round with pictures, and brackets, and hanging cabinets, and what you will; from point to point they follow it till the prosaic, box-like definition becomes a weariness to the flesh. And yet how grateful a relief to the eye tired of angular repetition is the modest front of an old corner cupboard, whether rising from a pediment, or hanging, unsup-

ported by a base, in its proper niche. Few auxiliary chattels add so greatly to the decorative comfort of a room as one of these unobtrusive little armoires, of which the best, as usual, are of bygone build. How and why their manufacture declined it were difficult to tell, but the process of degeneration has been very complete.

It were needless to chronicle the long *dégringolade* which finds its newest expression in a depraved little triangular variant of the late unlamented "what-not," made in the weary American walnut-wood, with a futile cupboard of absurdly insignificant dimensions about midway, surmounted by ill-proportioned platforms tapering to a summit whose curves are an embodiment of the commonplace. The back is inlaid with two small panels of looking-glass, and the under portion is as jejune in design as the top. To such base uses has fallen a useful and a comely tradition. Yet if the modern instances are, for the most part, below criticism, the old are not far to seek—at this very moment comes to mind a certain dingy shop, in a certain dingy street, where but lately there was for the buying a homely yet well-designed example at a price far beneath that which would be demanded for some silly ebonized or enamelled triviality in deal or pine—but that were for emergency, not for primary selection. If you are "to pay your money and take your choice," there are several delightful species of this pleasing genus, among which you may wander at will if you have but the taste for adventure and the time at your disposal.

Perhaps the more to be preferred, from the romantic point of view, is the painted kind—tall, narrow, slightly *bombé*, with elaborate gilt metal mounts and a *naïveté* of motive that furnishes

a happy antithesis to the complexities of tone and colour—three parts due to time, one part, perhaps, to the original designer—that characterize these relics of other times and other manners. The subjects are mostly Scriptural, “Susannah and the Elders,” “The Queen of Sheba’s Visit to King Solomon” (and here the apes and the peacocks are delightfully rendered), “The Sacrifice of Abraham,” “David harping to Saul,” “The Adoration of the Magi.” All these were favourite episodes with the painters of this sort of corner cupboard, who, it is supposed, were chiefly those Huguenot refugees who took shelter from a Papistical persecution, in England. Hence the pious character of the motives, which however, it hardly needs to say, do not force themselves upon you in any way as subjects.

The lapse of years and the mellowing influences of varnish have blurred and deepened outline and tone until the whole picture tells, not pictorially, but as decoration pure and simple, as a colour scheme with strange harmonies unpremeditated by the painter, and in all likelihood so much the better thereby. Seen, as it normally is, from a little distance, an old painted corner cupboard on which is set forth—archaically enough, in all conscience—the angelic visitation to the shepherds concerning the birth of Christ, seems full of mysterious colour-chords and vaguely fair suggestions, as remote from the actual design, with its rude composition, and its wellnigh grotesque drawing, as pole from pole. The brass hinges and the scutcheon of the lock are quaint and well-designed, while a graceful finish is provided by three graceful little plateaus of the black lacquered wood, growing small by degrees and beautifully less, that crown the top and furnish a becoming shrine for a Worcester bowl

and a small trumpet-shaped Nankin vase. Norwich, for obvious reasons, was wont to be the happiest hunting-ground for these cupboards ; but, as with most else, a judicious round of the less known London dealers, not forgetting or despising the meanest and most unpromising-looking shops, would now prove a more profitable measure.

Most things worth having drift Londonwards, while of those that yet remain in the country the owners have lately conceived an exaggerated idea as to their value. And, moreover, in any case the dealer will most likely have been before you.

An especially pleasing variety of the corner-cupboard is in old Japanese or Chinese lac work ; but this is not always easy to find in a good state of preservation, and when "restored" is practically worthless. The raised designs in pale or copper-toned gold upon the rich black ground are often extremely beautiful ; one no more tires of these idyls of Cathay, with their strange little golden trees and bridges and people, and their hints of lordly pleasure-houses in weird impossible perspective, than of the "Arabian Nights" or "Old Deccan Days." Then there are the charming eighteenth-century corner cupboards, inlaid with marquetry of coloured woods, with a panelled door below, and above a trellised glass lattice, through which the gleam of antique Dutch silver and finely-coloured porcelain shows all the fairer for its incomplete revealment. The cornices of some have the inverted heart-shaped opening in the centre common to their period, while in others the egg-and-dart pattern, or finely-reeded mouldings, decorate the upper portions. Tall or short, inlaid or plainly panelled, of oak, mahogany, rosewood, camphor-wood, lac, or amboyna, they are all and each desirable possessions, and worthy

not only, like Lord Tennyson's warrior, to be loved, but to be imitated—provided it be done well.

The evolution of the timepiece shows so much in common with the human development brought forth by the hours it registers—the development of life and thought—that you might almost take its history for the history of civilization itself; the spirit of the age speaking, or keeping silence, in its clocks. The comparative quietude of the past, the slower movement of life as it was lived long since; the deeper dependence on natural elements that belonged to more primitive periods than our own, were given expression in the sundial, the water-clock, the hour-glass; while the fret and fever of modern existence, the hurly-burly and turmoil of to-day are very adequately typified in our loud-voiced time-keepers, ticking away for dear life, as it were; vociferous of haste, of hours packed with teeming circumstance. Their tongues are sharp with hurried admonition, imperative with shrewd reminders. A modern clock is often a terrible shrew, and the newest are ever the noisiest. So tyrannical, of such an intolerably overbearing habit are some, indeed, that their owners, when sensitive or sluggish by nature, have been known to take refuge in flight, and even in summary eviction of the offending object. There have been those whose whole morality has been warped, whose every good impulse has been stifled, whose evil tendencies have been forced to full fruition by the pitiless nagging of a new American clock.

Without haste and without rest was the speech of the ancient timepiece, as soothing to the sense as the purring of a cat, or the low flickering sound of a wood fire in winter twilight. A dignified deliberation, a fine impassivity as of Time's voice itself made



audible, distinguished its tones. But then there were fewer clocks, fewer folk, and infinitely more leisure. Now, generally speaking, the last invented clock ticks on the shelf with the rhythm of a steam laundry, the intonation of a sewing machine, febrile, inclined to triviality, and utterly void of composure. It is strange that the tall old eight-day pattern, chiefly known of late by the silly grandparental name foisted upon it by a too-popular song, has fallen into desuetude among clock-makers, for it possessed in no mean measure the quality of quaintness; its proportions were pleasing, and in just relation to its importance; it would, for the most part, keep excellent time, while the homely charm of it lies past analysis. Altogether it was a kindly and a comely piece of plenishing, which, even although it might on occasion so far overstep the limits of its proper province as to act as banshee, had much to recommend it.

And, after all, there are not many eight-day clocks officious or zealous enough invariably to strike thirteen before "a death in the family." The black-and-gold lacquered kind is, perhaps, the rarest to come by nowadays, and (like most rarities) among the more desirable. Very seldom is it found in perfect preservation; and, where the hand of the restorer has been busy, the result is decorative worthlessness; the rich colours, the peculiar sheen of old lacquer cannot be successfully simulated, neither can the modern occidental designer recapture the feeling of lines and curves traced far away and long ago. Better far to tolerate scars and bruises, headless figures, vague trees, all but obliterated flowers and peacocks, and to make the most of what is left. Even in mutilation and decay these old lacquered panels will throw out dim suggestions of romance, will hint

elusively at far-off festivities in strange lands. They have a fascination that is all their own.

So, indeed, have the austerer oaken or mahogany examples, with their straight, simple forms, their brazen or painted dials. The brass face, especially when finely designed and chased, is good, and very good; but no less estimable, though humbler in pretension, is the white face, sometimes flowered like an old chintz, sometimes adorned with landscapes, marines, or figure-subjects. One bearing a wreath of painted convolvuli, very delicate and sweet in colouring and line, furnishes a pleasant instance of a satisfying effect produced with the slenderest of properties.

There is a plentiful variety of these tall eight-day clocks to select from; but London, and no longer the country, is the best place wherein to seek them. The trail of the dealer is over nearly all the once happy rustic hunting-grounds for antique furniture, while the cottager has somehow developed a delusion that any chattel whatsoever, provided it be old or sufficiently decayed, is of immense value. The amateur collector should beware, moreover, of the clock whose case has been afflicted with modern carving or inlaying, a most reprehensible practice to which the restorer is not a little addicted. Now, given a moderate expenditure of time and energy, the most likely spots for *trouvailles* of this kind are the shops of obscure horologists, throughout town and suburb, where, indeed, have charming discoveries been made, not over cheap, perhaps, in the eyes of the confirmed bargain-hunter, yet sufficiently reasonable in price for the upright buyer, who may be sportsmanlike enough to object to extremes on either side. At such a shop was found only the other day a fine survival of old-world elegance—an Empire time-

piece in yellow marble and bronze, a triumph of happy harmony and chaste design, where the cunningly-wrought metal tones to admiration with the main structure, and the whole form makes a happy combination of grace and dignity.

As regards purely modern clock designs, the less said the better, with one sole exception—to wit, the memorable clock designed by Barye for the benefit of a personal friend; and of this, we believe, there exist but two replicas. It is to be regretted that there are no more; for, for sheer majesty of construction, this timepiece of Barye's stands unrivalled. Monumental, yet in no wise sepulchral, the low base of black marble, with its broad, simple planes, its superb proportions, forms a perfect pedestal for the bronze group it supports and leads up to, while of this group (a tiger seizing an antelope) it is enough to say that it is modelled in the great *animalier's* finest manner, full of classic feeling, of strength and stateliness, of noble forms nobly found and nobly expressed.

It seems odd that latter-day invention should be so bare of decorative virtue as it is. The reproductions of antique models are, as a general rule, delightful; that is to say, when the model is followed with blind submission and slavish exactitude. But it is quite otherwise when we come to attempts at adaptation or originality. Our adaptations are garbled deformities; our original designs absolutely fatuous when not exasperating—the imagination boggles at them.

A sedan chair, simulated in mixed metals, with a clock introduced as a portion of its anatomy, is merely foolish; an oval china frame—encircling a dial—bedizened with gimcrack flowers and cupids, irritates by its supreme silliness and incongruity; a huge and flamboyantly muscular bronze effigy

of Time, in the act of bounding off with a clock under his arm, like a clown with a Christmas goose, is nothing short of a chronometrical crime, so pompously bad is it in every possible way; while the common marble or slate sarcophagus, tooled (in bookbinding phrase) in silver or gold, depresses by its assumption of decorative chastity, its hopeless dullness. Far from offensive is the ebonized wooden clock, with blue china dial; but the form of it is never amusing, the workmanship never sufficiently subtle for the size.

Porcelain clocks are, for the most part, about as degraded as such things can be; amorphous anarchies of fruits, flowers, and cherubs; but here, again, you may find exceptions, in the invariable shape of reproductions, and notably a small white and gold variety, very pretty and simple, fluted with pilasters at the four corners, and daintily sprigged with painted flowers on either flank and before. But, to be sure, on every hand there are admirable replicas to be had for the buying; especially successful are those of the Louis XV. period, genteelly gay with buhl and ormolu; ornate almost to floridity, yet ever graceful of form. A dark green enamelled clock, painted with festoons and flower baskets, and gloriously set about with fine ormolu, is decidedly fair to see; so, indeed, are some lyre-shaped copies, of later design, carried out in ormolu and alabaster; but most entirely charming of all small new clocks after old designs is one carved in white agate, pure and translucent, shaped like an Attic altar, engarlanded with golden flowers and ribbons, and surmounted by a little gold Eros, who plays upon a pierced reed. The dial, of course, is in the front of the pedestal. This same device, by the way, charms almost as wisely when carried out in jade and dull silver.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE FLOOR.

“There might ye see the peony spread wide,  
The full-blown rose, the shepherd and his lass,  
Lapdog and lambkin with black staring eyes,  
And parrots with twin cherries in their beak.”

“THE ground,” says Artemus Ward, “flew up and hit me on the head ;” which deplorable episode, unhappily, is far from being unique or even uncommon. Many carpets do ; to say nothing of other kinds of floor-covering, and are, in consequence, gey ill to live wi’. To be sure, there is at the present time a very fair proportion of really admirable modern carpets, but a few years ago there was no room for selection ; it was merely a case of Hobson’s choice. If you could afford Persian carpets you took them and were happy—if not, you must needs either have raised the faculty of ignoring to the rank of a fine art, or lived as much as possible out of doors. Nothing imaginable could be more blatantly offensive in every decorative sense, even from the most rudimentary point of view, than the carpets of yesteryear, with their hard, noisy colours, their base and demonstrative designs, now made in simulation of some glaringly inappropriate natural object, now aping the textile semblance of other fabrics with a sickening verisimilitude that haunts the memory like the recollection of a bad dream, or of some



especially idiotic comic song long out of date. Perhaps these counterfeit presentments of blowsy flowers, sprawling ferns, seaweeds, watered silk, and so forth, were at their very worst when made in Brussels carpeting; but even the softening influence of deep pile was of small avail as a disguise to their native, invincible hideousness, which outraged every law of taste, and laughed, naked and unashamed, in the face of fitness.

Carpets, like wall-coverings—and it may be even to a greater degree—must act primarily as backgrounds for all objects placed over them: harmonious, unobtrusive, at least a tone or two lower than aught else in the room, the ideal carpet should be seen, not noticed. The design of it, like the design of a Monticelli, must never jump to the eyes, but only detach itself in deliberate revelation under stress of earnest contemplation. Form must dissolve into form, tone into tone, colour into colour, with the pleasant dimness of underwoods in summer, or reflections in a dark glass or a shadowed pool. The design may be as intricate as you please, or as simple, but it must not assert, it must not obviously repeat itself. As an accomplished artist dissimulates his mastery of line, so must the carpet designer weave around and over the fine curves, the symmetrical forms of his pattern, a clear obscurity of illusion that shall enhance while half veiling their graces.

As for colour, it may be as rich as you please (always considering the scheme and key of the room), but it must, before all, be mellow. A carpet should, as it were, glow forth with a subdued splendour of colour from between the furniture set upon it, keeping at the same time its proper place in the general harmony, and fulfilling the first law of its being by an appearance of reposeful reticence

and sober wealth. It is easy to err in the matter of carpeting ; when floors were strewn with rushes, there was little latitude for ill-doing, but now there is every opportunity for the heedless, together with a multiplicity of temptations for the tasteless. A large design carried out definitely in rich, striking colours will destroy your furniture as certainly as a hungry, able-bodied cat will absorb an unprotected canary ; while the self-same patterning, rendered in dim, low-toned dyes, may, on the other hand, look all that a fond heart could wish.

To-day there are three alternatives—the last indubitably the best, albeit, perhaps, the costliest. The deep pile carpet of one rich, dull hue, with an arabesque, renaissance, or geometrically patterned border, is good, and very good ; and altogether estimable, again, is that which bears a powdering—in a lighter tone of the same colour as the ground—of finely-conventionalized forms at proper intervals, blurred with a becoming vagueness. Pleasing species of this genus, for example, are presented in a colour-chord of green, dim, yet pure in quality, bearing a device of Empire laurel-garlands, tied (as it will be remembered) with graceful knots of ribbon ; and in a symphony of lapis-lazuli and a fainter blue, the pattern of which is a charmingly conceived Japanese convention for a lotus. Both these, of course, have appropriate borders. But comely and reviving though they, and some others into the bargain, may be, an old Persian carpet, in a good state of preservation, is infinitely to be preferred. The broken tones, the delightful variations of the pile, the jewelled maze of colour, with its myriad surprises ; dim, for all its splendour, as a rose under water in prison ; the strangely beautiful, outlandish

shapes, born of an ancient civilization, another race and time, and placed much as a master of painting places his composition on the canvas—all this, fair with an unfamiliar excellence, charms always and charms wisely. Age cannot wither nor custom stale the attractions of a really fine Persian carpet; its indistinct and infinite variety—half dissimulated under the pious pretence of repetition—would alone keep your affection for it quick and lively, your fidelity firm. In such case you may possibly change your faiths, your friends, but not—most assuredly not—your carpet.

Time was when the possession of a Turkey carpet was almost as recognizedly the outward and visible sign of financial and respectable grace as that of a gig; and, indeed, it is always estimable if often unattractive. When very old and faded, it is decidedly a thing to be desired, but the ordinary Turkey carpet of commerce rejoices in a magenta movement that massacres everything in its neighbourhood. Like a late distinguished warrior, it charges the enemy with horrid imprecations and notable effect; wherefore, in spite of its pleasing texture, it were better let alone.

For rooms where the decorations are set in a high key, with white and gold, and painted flower-engarlanded walls, nothing but an Aubusson is possible. The pearly, yet warm, greys and fawns, besprent with faint delicate tracteries of roses and ribbons, of this veritable Ronsard among carpets, suit admirably with the pale elegance of a certain type of decoration, the type that is penetrated with a sentiment of stately frivolity, and an old-world atmosphere of faded gaities and forgotten galas. And if, as may very well be, real

Aubusson be out of reach, there is now no lack of excellent modern replicas from which to choose.

The floor itself should, obviously, be darker than the carpet, in the same proportion as the carpet is darker than the rest of the room; old or new parquet, of variously coloured woods; or plain, perfectly laid and fitted, planks of oak almost black with age, or of Indian teak, are all admirable alternatives. And, failing these, the parquet that is in reality but a cunning veneer, bought by the yard, and laid at inconsiderable cost, is eminently satisfactory.

Halls and stairs and corridors are best carpeted when completely covered with thick pile of one deep full colour: best, that is to say, in a house that harbours no children, dogs, or cats—a house wherein the dwellers are few, and dainty of habit. The heedless comings and goings of a large family mean perpetual demoralization to a plain carpet, whereon the mark of a muddy boot is as conspicuous as the memorable footstep of Friday, and little less startling. And here a new kind of carpet, called Roman, offers itself, and seems to solve the difficulty. It is thick and substantial, with a pleasing coarseness of grain, that does not make at all for hardness of effect. The colours are good, and there is just enough patterning, artistically blurred—the small, conventional designs are scattered over a plain ground—to ignore, if not to dissemble, the filthy witness of the street. Of the dismal, the disgusting, oilcloth; of the dreary, tessellated pavement, invariably (and wherefore?) odious in design and colour to boot, there is nothing to be said—their case is desperate and unalterable, and their popularity founded on the solid rock of bad taste. It is more profitable to reflect upon the

large alternating diamonds of black marble and white that still pave some old halls, both here and in Holland, and also upon a comely sort of coarse mosaic, recently produced, which is made of thick dull glass.



## CHAPTER VIII.

### BLUE CHINA. GLASS.

BLUE china, in the world of faïence, occupies much the same position as Shakespeare in poetry, or Velasquez in painting. Use cannot hackney it, nor fashion stale its inestimable decorative virtues. Even the worship of the person mis-called "æsthetic" has failed to inspire distaste for a ware so admirable in detail, so valuable in general effect; and this, it may be, is the severest test of all. To survive unspotted the enthusiasm of some sorts of virtuoso is only possible to a commodity of the first excellence, the rarest perfection; while yet another proof of its undying charm may be perceived in the appreciation, not of collectors alone, but of the ordinary human creature who is not entirely devoid of artistic instinct. To this, too, do the multiplicity of imitations and reproductions, all more or less well-meant and ineffective, bear ample witness; for, like the few other things that are unquestionably and comprehensibly good, the best blue china both invites and disclaims the pasticcio; it is Siren and Gorgon in one, the ambition and the despair of the imitator, who can command all things save the influence of time and the spirit of old designing.

The patterning appears so simple, the colours, both of ground and device, so easy of emulation,

and still they evade modern skill, much as the charm of a sitter's face may elude an academic portrait-painter, whose brushwork, whose draughtsmanship are beyond reproach, and who lacks nothing but artistic intuition and spontaneity. How delightful is old Delft, with its faintly-blurred devices, its occasional uncertainty of outline, its happy archaism, its naïve shapes—here are quaint, rudely-drawn pastorals that somehow set the imagination agog—fishermen in broad-brimmed hats, fishing placidly from banks beside smooth waters where august galleons are seen swimming by with all sails set—how pleasant in tone is the white, how refined the blue, how inimitable the quality of the old glaze. Even the oddly-fashioned birds and beasts that form the covers—too often, alas! chipped or found wanting—to one of the most familiar species of vase, grandiose, yet unpretentious, in its portly simplicity; even these are divested of all suggestion of romance when translated into modern manufacture.

The copyist is too intelligent and not intelligent enough; he will refine the swelling nobility of the Falstaffian shape—much as Sir Edward Burne-Jones might, were he so disposed, give his own individual rendering of a Terburg motive;—then, again, his lines are drawn with unwavering distinctness; where they falter the false step is made of malice aforethought; their archaism is intentional, the entire production, as it were, self-conscious; while the colouring of the copy has little, save in name, in common with the original. It were better to take the bull by the horns and be frankly new—or as new as the possibilities admit—than to court disaster by trying to recapture those first fine careless raptures of designers whose whole sympathies

and inspirations were so completely upon another plane.

There should be small need, if your desires are moderate, and you are willing to search the second-hand shops diligently, for buying new blue china ; but where economy of time and money together is imperative, modern Oriental, and Japanese in particular, is the best to choose. Of course the finesse, the fine colouring, "the glaze and the mark of china that's ancient and blue," will be wanting ; but if you have not that you like, you must needs like that you have, and, decoratively speaking, there is a good deal to like in some of these new Niponic productions, which would, and not unnaturally, be condemned by the collector as trash, yet, nevertheless, show, even in degeneracy and decline, a few faint traces of inherited excellence. Made, unhappily, for the English market, and influenced, accordingly, for vulgarity, they still retain some vestiges of the old grace ; and thus, judiciously chosen, may serve to cheer a cottage chimney-piece or tea-table, to shine not all uncomely in the modest chiaroscuro of a glazed corner-cupboard, or, perhaps in felicitous conjunction with old pewter plates and candlesticks, to bedeck the dark shelves of an oaken dresser.

These, of course, for a *pis aller* ; while, for pure pleasure, there is no ware whatever that approaches the undying attractions of old blue and white, be it porcelain or Delft, English or Oriental. You may be absolutely ignorant of the inner mysteriousness of marks, you may not even have sufficient knowledge to distinguish between kinds and periods ; and still this lack of learning need scarcely interfere with your happiness in the acquisition or the possession of dragon bowl, haw-

thorn jar, and aster plate ; neither should it mar your appreciation of their beauties.

True, the owner of blue china is one who gives hostages to fortune in no insignificant degree. Less happy, from one point of view, than the lord of Japanese bronzes or the keeper of kake-monos, he trembles at the inauguration of a new waiting-maiden, at the advent of an exuberant guest ; while a change of dwelling has, for him, something of the bitterness of death. On the other hand, granted a certain serenity of temperament and a little philosophy, the possession of such porcelain offers perennially more opportunities of pleasure than, perhaps, any other sort of chattel that is formed at once for use and for ornament. If you choose you may have it always with you, and yet never tire of it. From the old Dutch tile that serves as tea-pot stand—thus far exalted above its brethren that line the hearth-place with Scriptural anecdote—to the great covered jar with the little round button on the top and the majestically-bulging sides, flowered with indigo birds and blossoms without, and fragrant inside with crumbling drifts of *pot-pourri*, there is hardly a bit of blue china that may not find employment, and, indeed, indispensability of some sort.

Never incongruous, never inopportune, admirable alike in the mass and the isolated instance, it is one of those good things of which it were impossible to have too much. A single piece, appropriately enshrined, is a joy, so long as it remains whole and unchipped, to its possessor, and may, moreover, prove the salvation of a whole room, provided the accessories are sufficiently submissive. Upon the supreme decorative value of it in the group, it were needless to descant ; with the most crass stupidity it were difficult to arrange

it so as to look ill, and a little—a very little—discrimination in disposal will go far. In judicious juxtaposition with Japanese bronzes, antique Dutch *repoussé* work in silver; dark, polished wooden surfaces, or with “anything,” as Elia quotes it, “that is old and pretty,” blue china will produce an effect not merely of exquisite decorative refinement, but of decorative romance and colour entirely satisfying both to the eye and the imagination.

It was Charles Lamb, above all, with his “almost feminine partiality for old china” (as well as “old and pretty” wares), who understood and expressed the vague enchantment of “those little, lawless, azure-tinctured grotesques, that under the notion of men and women float about, uncircumscribed by any element, in that world before perspective—a china tea-cup. . . . Here is a young and courtly Mandarin handing tea to a lady from a salver—two miles off. See how distance seems to set off respect! And here the same lady, or another—for likeness is identity on tea-cups—is stepping into a little fairy boat, moored on the hither side of this calm garden river, with a dainty mincing foot, which in a right angle of incidence (as angles go in our world) must infallibly land her in the midst of a flowery mead a furlong off on the other side of the same strange stream! Farther on, if far or near can be predicted of their world, see horses, trees, pagodas, dancing the hays. Here a cow and rabbit, couchant and co-extensive—so objects show seen through the lucid atmosphere of fine Cathay.” In the world of blue china there are no right angles of incidence, no stubborn facts, but only a sweet unreasonableness—a happy and blessed inconsequence; it is fairy-land, in fine, driven back to its last intrenchments.



“Walking about among blue trees, blue bridges, and blue rivers,” these little figures exercise an odd fascination that perhaps is all the keener for being indefinable, and that, certainly, is unique. But flowers, as a rule, show to best advantage in jars of floral or geometrical design; a richly-coloured, heavily-patterned vase, globular above and tapering below to its round base, with a device of something like pomegranates and lattice-work, seems, as it were, made to hold tulips, saffron, or vermilion, or both, motley-wise, together. A shallow bowl, festooned with clusters of strange flowers and engarlanded with love-knots, seems the very vessel for white and pink roses.

Nothing in the world is, perhaps, much more deplorable than the degradation of a good thing. At the cheap allurements of the frankly execrable productions of the novelty-monger you can but smile, and pass by on the other side; that is, be it understood, when they stand independently on their own demerits, odious and unashamed; a group of commercial fungi bred of the debased longings of the greater number. With these you need hardly be concerned; blue cats clinging to pink cream-jugs, green puppy-dogs in yellow top-hats, whose mission it may be to contain pins, matches, and what not; morbidly mottled vessels for holding flowers, bestuck with bloated caricatures of roses in a species of laidly relief; of such is the kingdom of novelties. Offspring of the intellectual gutter, with none, or with all ignoble ancestry, not one of their company is worth reckoning with; they exist—so do the cheap-jack, the vendor of quack remedies, the purveyor of penny novelettes, and all have their uses; each in turn assuages a certain craving in the great

heart of the people, and thus is not without the virtues of its kind.

The only times when you are almost persuaded to sigh over the gross imbecility of contemporary novelties—whether indigenous or “made in Germany”—are those that find you fresh from the contemplation of some chance flotsam and jetsam of Japanese domestic detail that may have drifted your way. Then the recognition of that sixth sense (the product partly of an ancient civilization) that falls little short of an absolutely unerring and infallible artistic instinct, the heritage of a bare score of souls outside Japan, strikes you wellnigh with a sense of national humiliation. Your patriotism suffers for the moment, in that the poorest artisan of Niponic birth should be, generally speaking, endowed with an artistic *flair* undreamed of in the philosophy of our most pretentious manufactories.

It is a curious reflection, moreover, that the humble maker of a paper lanthorn, a paper fan, a trifle wrought out of clay or bamboo, will produce, as instinctively as a bird builds its nest, a fairly satisfying and often charming work of art, a thing good after its kind; while the laboured and costly creations of the average British designer are, from the decorative standpoint, worth just so much as, and no more than, the materials of which they are constructed. But this is somewhat beside the question; we are not an artistic race, our decorative salvation is yet to win; the great majority of us cries aloud for abominations of ornament, and abominations increase and multiply accordingly with the horrid fecundity of most organisms that are low down in the scale of existence. Art is long, and time is fleeting, and predilection is individual after all. If an ill thing

please you, by all means take it, and be happy; only you are not to cry taste where there is no taste, assuming that your choice is goodly, because it happens to be new, or to present a salient verisimilitude to some other object or fabric—the very last, in all likelihood, that it should resemble—and so finds favour in your eyes.

And it is this insatiate craving for the preposterous, but above all for the new, that is responsible for the degrading of Venetian glass, once among the most graceful and praiseworthy of such commodities, but to-day a source of sorrow to such as remember it in its golden prime. For long it has been growing steadily weaker and more trivial in design, poorer and commoner in colour; and now it would seem as though the very last depth were sounded, the darkest gulf of ornamental infamy gauged, when an ill-shapen dessert-service of ruby-coloured Venetian glass—the quality of colour in itself is odious, but let that pass—is still further deformed by the addition of lace doyleys simulated in opaque white glass, with flagree tracery, drooping corners—all the spurious realism possible, in fine.

And this debauch of diseased imitateness (ingenuity you cannot call it) stands insolently cheek by jowl with a few straggling survivals of a better day. You may notice a tall blue vase, deep and luminous in tone, pleasing of outline, flanked near the broad-lipped mouth by two golden griffins as handles. Or again, there is a certain small shell-like cup, iridescently green, on a long, slender, twisted stalk; and here, too, the supporting insignia are of glistening yellow, very fine and pale; while a dim blue goblet, with pearly wings and well-proportioned base, lays stress with melancholy insistence on what has been, but shall

be no more for ever. The beautiful airy forms, the curves as lightly symmetrical as those of a soap-bubble, the delicate flower-like hues have spread and coarsened into rank growths, meaningless and uncomely, barren of restraint or distinction. What was fanciful has become merely florid, that which was refinement has sickened into sheer inanity. In short, the trail of novelty is over it all.

But if there is cause for regret in the decline of this once delightful ware, there is also matter for gratulation over the designs of other kinds of glass, some revivals, and some further developments of existing varieties, that are being produced at the present time. The modern replicas of the old diamond-cut glass could scarce be better of their kind ; there is a cheerful and abiding charm about the sparkling solidity of an array of these ; a quality that inspires confidence, that invites esteem without appealing too strongly to the imagination. With cut glass of the first excellence—and none other is worth a glance—you cannot but be safe. But, should you incline to more adventurous ways, there is room and to spare for the indulgence of romantic impulse. There comes to mind a group of table-glass, generous, yet elegant of form, very thin, but with bold swelling curves and undulant brim ; here ornament and structure are in absolute harmony—a waving design of single peacock feathers, in pleasing sequence, proportioned to a marvel, and disposed with true artistry, is engraved on each piece, and the result is success.

Another excellent set, with less of fantasy, but with full as lasting a grace, is taller, something stouter of build, patterned with an indented, diapered design, limpid and soft in effect, and vaguely reminiscent of small antique casement panes.

For flower vases, provided they are to be glass, it is hardly possible to have anything better than those clear green glasses that have been so much with us of late in a multiplicity of admirably simple forms, among the best of which is the plain trumpet-shape, moulded something after the manner of a convolvulus, yet scarce so wide at the mouth, and altogether a little slenderer and longer of make. The same designs, mainly suggested, more or less, by antique models, are produced in amethyst-coloured glass as well; and this is an error of judgment, as is also the too prevalent use of engraving on glasses meant to hold flowers. White, or rather, colourless, glass, and the clear, green kind aforesaid, are the only entirely satisfactory kinds to be used for the purpose; albeit, it is true, that a cluster of those purple anemones such as bloom in the fields outside Florence in early spring, has been seen to look vastly well in a low wide-mouthed glass, opalescently lilac and amber, with an engarlanding key-pattern in pale brown.

It is well that the inane little "specimen glass" has long since departed to that limbo where so much of good and so much of bad have gone too, and there is the less fear of its return, inasmuch as its place has been latterly filled by a substitute that is certainly inoffensive, and when filled with some sense of arrangement, by no means unlovely. It is about four inches high, somewhat pitcher-shaped, made both in white and in green glass, and is peculiarly suited for holding pansies, violets, the small frail monthly roses, nasturtiums, and many another flower that, from some structural peculiarity of its own, presents difficulties of disposition.

Unfitted for most flowers, but very comely in



themselves, are some replicas of antique glass vases, urns, and tear-vessels—more especially the latter—that have appeared within the last few years. The shifting iridescence of green and gold, with all the other interchanging hues that flash and fade as the light takes one direction or another, is discreetly reproduced; neither too bright is it, nor over-dim; while the forms of the vessels, some four-legged and rotund, some tapering and slim-necked, others with a kind of archaic beauty of outline not to be despised, convey admirably the spirit of the originals. It were well if all reproduction could be as intelligently carried out, and from models as worthy of imitation.

## CHAPTER IX

### TEA AND ITS SERVICE.

WHEN leaves fall and cold winds come, and the voice of the muffin-bell is heard in the land ; when the roses are gone where the late lingering autumn blooms soon must follow, then the red and golden hearth resumes its sway as the most important factor in daily life, and indoor comfort again is lord of all. That, pre-eminently, is the season of afternoon tea. On the green cedar-shaded lawn, in the cool summer parlour, the tinkle of tea-cups and the murmur of the urn are less in sympathy with the sentiment of the hour than the clink of the ice-pail and the sound of the lemon-squeezers. Comely and reviving as is the ceremony in all seasons, the true sentiment of the tea-table flowers only at its fullest in autumnal and in wintry twilights, before the candles are lit, when the firelight makes mirrors for itself of wainscoted walls and polished surfaces, and moving shadows bend and beckon from the corners in fantastic invitation to both memory and imagination at once. Even as the dead and buried roses, mourned by Gerda, forsook their places in the wise woman's garden to bloom in painted semblance the winter through upon their mistress's tall, steeple-crowned hat, it might be thought that the rosy garlands on our tea-cups and saucers had come thither in like manner to blossom in purple and red from wind-swept plea-

saunce and desolate parterre. But, fantasy apart, it is indisputable that a certain atmosphere of romance must always cling to an old china tea-service, and not to the service alone, but to all the manifold appurtenances of its dainty equipage. An atmosphere born partly of association with a courtly age, not too remote for realization in thought, and yet sufficiently far for the enchantment of distance; partly of the obvious antithesis—the unappealing pathos, if you will—that attaches to all frail inanimate things of intimate usage that have long survived their possessors, passing from hand to hand, from hearth to hearth, hung round with lost memories and garlanded with faded circumstance as with dead flowers. Every day that comes and goes is the day of small things, and small things have a power and a dignity of their own that only the dull may despise.

From the “tea-cup times,” when tea was sold at ten shillings a pound and more, and tulip bulbs were as costly as orchids are now, to the days of Charles Lamb and his hyson, which he was “old-fashioned enough to drink unmixed still of an afternoon,” and up to the present, the practice of tea-drinking has of course varied appreciably as to hour, and perhaps a little as to manner; but such changes are as nothing compared to those that have overtaken the wherewithal of its fulfilment. From the shallow, handleless cup of almost translucent blue and white porcelain, not much deeper or larger than the chalice of a windflower, and scarcely less delicate of texture and design, to the more solid splendours of Worcester, Crown Derby, Spode, and the like; from these again to the blowsy begilded cheeks and bloated forms of early, and late, Victorian atrocities, the road is long, and the full enumeration too tedious to be

entered upon here. On this head it needs only to say that good—as we shall presently see—as are some of the modern examples, there is none that does not, directly or indirectly, owe the glories of its birth and state to older models, and the more direct the debt the greater the glory.

For the older models are incomparably the finest; they excel easily in shape, colour, design, and, above all, in that nameless poetry of effect which partakes of all these excellences, and yet is definitely embodied in none; the soul, in short, that inhabits every work of art, that looks out from the canvases of Matthys Maris, and Velasquez, that sings in the lyrics from “The Princess.” More elusive and manifold of aspect than Thetis herself, it shifts from one form to another, and yet is ever the same in essence, and ever to be recognized, whether dwelling in a painting that is for all time, a Grecian urn, a goblet of Cellini’s craftsmanship, or even “in that world before perspective—a china tea-cup.” Innumerable are the factitious sighs, mostly lyrical, that have been heaved for the snows of yester-year, but the ballad of broken china is still to sing; the irreparable breakages of the last ninety years or so, to say the least of it; the shattered sets whose remaining wreckage bears piteous witness to the grievousness of their destruction, they are all uncelebrated in song. But, although so much is lost, and with the rest Elia’s “set of extraordinary old blue china (a recent purchase),” there is yet much to be glad for as regards such examples of bygone taste and skill that time, and a long succession of neat-handed Phyllises, have chanced to spare. And of the multitude, perhaps the loveliest and the best, from the purely artistic point of view, of course, is the old Oriental blue and white, with its

exquisite texture, its incomparable blue, its inimitable white, that is in reality neither white, nor bluish-white, nor grey, nor pearl colour ; its graceful forms, its preposterously charming designs, as impossibly sweet as a fairy tale or a pleasant dream. But this preference may, after all, however insensibly, be in some measure the outcome of an individual prepossession ; and, however that may be, there are sets in other kinds of ware so good that it were unwise to dogmatize upon their comparative virtues, the more especially as in shape and capacity these last are generally closer fitted to the exigencies of modern convenience than the cherished Nankin.

To particularize. One very fine example of a Worcester tea-service is, like so much other English ware, distinctly Oriental in inspiration. And here the principal charm lies in the rich and decorative qualities of colour and design : each piece is painted with alternate panels, so to speak, of white, with a patterning of dusky red flowers and green leaves ; and deep, dark blue, with one conventionalized red flower placed in the centre of the panel. With this set the caddy is superseded by a graceful little tea-jar, small enough to bring to mind the contemporary costliness of the fragrant leaves it was wont to contain.

Of a lighter cast of beauty is another set of Worcester, the cups handleless, and most elegantly fluted, the ground white ; engirdled, with an admirable sense of spacing and proportion, by bands of rich deep blue, as rich as lapis-lazuli and darker, these bands being relieved with golden stars and ribands. While lighter still in motive is a white set, also Worcester, besprent with dusky blue flowers and slim tracteries of small gold leaves and tendrils. Worcester, once more, and this time of a delight-



fully dainty frivolity, is a transfer set in *grisaille*, wherein gaiety and versatility may be seen to reign with equal sway.

Here you have every piece tricked out with a different subject, and each more or less after "le paradis de Watteau"—ladies with hoops and powdered hair, receiving gallants with full-skirted coats and high-heeled shoes, in stately gardens; backgrounds of weeping willow, classic urn, and laughing Abigail; foregrounds of formal flower-plots, frisking lap-dogs, gardening implements, and what not—all the pretty, half-prim, half-wanton affectations of the period seem gathered together to make perennial merriment within these miniature bounds. And, if the charm of colour be missing, the spirit of old-world festas, the charm of old-world quaintness should serve to atone.

Two notable instances of tea-services decorated, and to advantage, with armorial bearings, are both old Venetian of make, the one bold in design and almost barbarously fine in the opulence of its richly-massed colour; while the other, which also boasts a groundwork of white, shows a contrasting delicacy in colour and in character.

It reposes in pleasing completeness, and its original red leather casket lined with white velvet; each elegant little vessel bearing on one side the coat of arms in varying shades of pale amethyst, and on the other a tenderly-coloured group of fruit and flowers.

So hard it were to choose between the rival attractions of at least half-a-dozen admirable makes of porcelain, that the only ideal arrangement is to possess several services. Happy is she who has her china-closet full of them, for what can be more sincerely luxurious than the Japanesque practice of putting away one beautiful thing for a season,

and taking out another whose charms, half-forgotten, take on an added potency in the recognition? Before custom shall have had the chance to stale your pleasure in the blue-flowered Spode, how well it were to substitute something different in character although no less alluring of aspect.

For such as may be fortunate enough to have the means and the disposition to ring, every few months or oftener, as inclination prompts, the changes on their tea-cups—to relegate one set to safe and honourable retirement and transfer another into daily use—there is little fear of becoming insensible to the charms of their possessions. Suppose, for example, the whim takes you for something of a daintier, more austere, beauty than the robust and candid comeliness of the old Spode service that may have graced your tea-table for the last few months, with its cobalt-blue variant on the willow-pattern motive, enriched with rims and arabesques of highly-burnished gold. Then your eye—grown accustomed to the bounteous outlines of the buxom tea-pot, generously large and broad in the beam as a Dutch fishing-boat, the correspondingly comfortable, yet by no means unshapely, squabness of sugar-bowl and cream-ewer, and thus in a state to re-discover with revived enthusiasm the severer elegances of (say) a Chelsea Derby set, of Bristol pattern—would rest with accentuated complacence upon the slender proportions of the substitute, and your pleasure in the possession of both should be appreciably enhanced. If absence does not precisely make the heart grow fonder, or familiarity invariably breed contempt, it must at least be admitted that an admired object shows all the fairer after a brief period of separation, when you are brought to a fresh realization of its merits; and

that æsthetic sensibilities towards the smaller appurtenances of daily life are apt by force of habit to become dulled. Doubly elegant and chaste of form and colour will seem such a service as the Chelsea Derby we have in mind—slim, almost to severity, of shape, diagonally fluted, of a white particularly pure, garlanded in virginal simplicity with light traceries of little grass-green leaves and blossoms—after a diurnal familiarity with an ampler and more ornate kind of beauty. A not unworthy successor, in its turn, to this, might be found in a Chelsea service of much refinement, the ground white, with low, pear-shaped flutings alternatively white and sapphire blue, surmounted by green and golden garlands behind which dawns faintly a blurred band of amethystine pink. Or, if daintiness be the order of the day, an Amstel set, primrose and white, sprigged with all manner of small delicate flowers, should be regarded with more than temporary favour; while a Hague constellation of like purpose, adorned with a sequence of subjects in the manner of Lancret; or a Dresden service decorated in pale shell-tints, with airy flights of amorini, somewhat reminiscent of Boucher's gayest meinies, might be found far from amiss in certain moods.

For quaintness, or haply for the sake of contrast,—the more especially in a country house during the shooting season—an old Berlin tea-set, painted with Bewickesque presentations of wild birds and game, most minute and careful in detail, and with some pretty qualities of colour, may serve its turn; but the much vaunted splendours of Sèvres and Capo di Monte, however highly, and perhaps justly, esteemed from the collector's point of view, are not very deeply to be desired for either active service or passive decoration by those to whom

true refinement of character and artistic distinction are more essential in their household vessels and ornaments than commercial, or pedantic, value.

To the majority, of course, a wide repertory of old tea-services, and to many the possession of even one—in perfect condition—is out of the question, for sufficiently obvious reasons. But although economy may have to be studied, there is yet room enough for tact and taste, and for pleasure beside, in the choosing. It is possible, for instance—that is to say, if your heart be fixed on a tea-service that bears the stamp of an earlier and more spontaneously decorative period than the present—to purchase for inconsiderable sums the still graceful survivors of what has been an ample and a beautiful set. But in such a case you must prepare to be philosophical, and content yourself with perhaps no more than four or five unblemished cups and saucers, counting yourself fortunate if tea-pot, cream-ewer, sugar-bowl, and slop-basin be found intact. It seems hardly necessary to say that cracked or chipped china—unless, in lean years, destined to make colour behind the diamond-paned doors of a dimly-placed corner cupboard—is an ill bargain. For anything approaching to practical purposes it is obviously not to be thought of.

But when the old-fashioned porcelain tea-pot, together with its usual satellites, is found in unimpeachable preservation it is very well worth having indeed. Not that the admirable effect of a combination of daintily painted china cups with the starry glitter of silver vessels should be undervalued or ignored, for it is pleasing enough in all conscience; but it is nevertheless advisable to appreciate and esteem the tea-pot that is uniform with its dependencies in material and design. In

the first place, it repeats and emphasizes the usually fine note of colour struck by the minor pieces; and, in the second, it has a way of suffering most excellent tea to be made in the hidden recesses of its comely being. It has, moreover, to be remembered that many and many a silver tea equipage, intrinsically irreproachable, is so unlovely of mould as to make companionship with finely-shaped cups and saucers harmoniously impossible. The dark years that are as yet such a little way behind us produced some of their most lasting memorials in such florid forms as these.

Tea-services of pure white china, very fairly good in texture, are now to be had at small cost to the buyer; and these, if not the height of the heart's desire, are at least blameless; and at most, used with fine and spotless damask, charming in quality of tone. The subtleties of one white upon another seem scarce sufficiently appreciated as yet in details of decoration. Then there are some quite passable alternatives in cheap modern Oriental wares that put no undue strain upon a slender purse, the most pleasing and unpretentious being in blue and white, while the spurious Satsuma and Kaga should be left severely alone.

As regards the modern replicas and adaptations of old models, they leave—save for the sentiment, and for certain differences in mellowness of tone that may only be remedied by time—but little to be desired. True that all antique blue-and-white pottery and porcelain must, of sheer necessity, be set aside as impossible of imitation, the quality of colour in the white alone presenting an all-sufficient obstacle; but this notwithstanding, there is available a wide range of exceedingly charming designs, which the discriminating reproducer may revive without fear and without reproach.



Among the most remarkable of these replicas is a faithful copy of a Spode service, which attracts by its bold dignity of design and refined and splendid colour. An ultramarine ground, verging almost on purple, bears a device, very large in feeling and more than touched with Orientalism, of strange flowers and leaves, in amethysts, greens, dusky carnations, and dim white—the effect produced being much akin to those many-coloured posies of single anemones sold by flower-hawkers in early spring. Another Spode reproduction, entirely different in character, has on a white ground three rows of tiny upright rose-stocks, as prim as prim can be, but of a sweet austerity that greatly pleases the eye.

And Spode again is a most delightful arrangement on cups and saucers, generous in size, of great full-blown cabbage-roses clustered together upon a burnished gilt ground around a central gilt arabesque. This, indeed, is a triumph of frankly florid ornament, full of vivacity and distinction. Very dainty is a rain and ruin of roses in a mist of powdered gold, a reproduction of an old Derby pattern : here the vessels are small and somewhat slenderly shaped. The mock-jewelled Coalport services present a displeasing contrast to such as these. They appear as though intended for the use of Sir Gorgius Midas and his compeers, overloaded as they are with meretricious ornament, heavy with opaque and unimaginative hues, and thickly bedizened with gold. Of the many admirable reproductions after old models there is here neither time nor space to speak ; their name is fortunately Legion—but among the cloud of witnesses there are two that claim especial commendation : one, a Crown Derby device, has a white bow-fluted ground, besprent with tiny dark

blue cornflowers and dark green leaves ; the other set is also white, but sprigged with a multitude of little yellow wild roses. Among adaptations a white bow-fluted service, bordered with small carnations and gold foliage, bears off the palm ; while absolutely the best purely modern instance is a Copeland set, in white, amber, and pale green, with a most graceful and purely-coloured design of buttercups springing athwart the always elegant bow-flutings.

## CHAPTER X.

### ALL A-BLOWING AND A-GROWING ; WAIFS AND STRAYS ; GHOSTS.

“ He that has two cakes of bread, let him sell one of them for some flower of the narcissus ; for bread is the food of the body ; but narcissus is food for the soul.”—MAHOMET.

No need now for such sacrifice of one lawful appetite to another ; streets and shops vie with one another in many-coloured abundance of spring blooms ; they blossom like the rose, and there seems something almost of the miraculous in the exchange of a few dingy copper coins for so great a treasure of fragrance and freshness, something nearly akin to the strange bargaining in fairy-tales and the “ Arabian Nights.” But what soul could profitably feed on flowers of the narcissus, nervelessly stuffed into the self-same vessel with a bunch of gilliflowers and anemones, or other equally unsympathetic neighbours. It is, indeed, strange that so large a proportion of those who entertain an honest affection for flowers—who, had they only the prophet’s proverbial two cakes of bread, would assuredly sell one of them for some flower of the narcissus—still are given to treat them so unhandsomely in the matter of arrangement. You are led to wonder what manner of pleasure may be theirs in the blossoms they so innocently maltreat, whose charms they so successfully obscure ; but as even the most devoid of æsthetic sensibility

will far more readily forgive an aspersion on their morals than upon their taste (or the lack of it), this interesting problem is likely to remain unsolved.

It is not, of course, to be expected that a race so generally careless of and insensitive to, all the less obvious forms of beauty as ours, should have developed, as have the Japanese, a complete system and science of floral arrangement, with its own counsels of perfection, its own definite laws of line and structure, where twig and leaf, even as bud and blossom, have each their appointed parts to play in the beautiful scheme. This is an art by itself and a very complex and intricate accomplishment—yet well worth the mastery—with the Japanese. Our most felicitous arrangements would show, in comparison with the least of theirs, as commonplace as might a Millais beside a Velasquez, a lyric by Thomas Haynes Bailey printed opposite a sonnet of Shakespeare's.

Here we have not the time, nor, presumably, the inclination, to study so fair and comely a science. Most of us are every whit as well pleased by a trite and tasteless effect as by a fine harmony of line and colour. Flowers are flowers, we say, and everyone knows that a love for flowers is indicative of a refined and poetic cast of mind; so we take pink tulips, white lilac, and yellow tulips, and crowd all together in bowls of water, in as sickly a discord as ever made glad the heart of woman. Or we make posies of red anemones and daffodils, with sprays of mimosa gracefully stuck between; or unholy combinations of blue and pink hyacinths, and so forth, mostly too numerous both as to quantity and quality.

And it were so very easy, you would think so much easier even, not to err thus elaborately.

Simplicity is in this, at least, facile of achievement ; such a small amount of discrimination is necessary to perceive what vessels are best suited to the flowers you propose to set in water. It is naturally better to avoid mingling different kinds of flowers, unless you are dowered with a very finely-developed instinct for colour and proportion, which is rare. Three or four opaque pearl-white tulips, with their tall stems and pale green leaves, in a slender jar of old Japanese bronze are immeasurably better than the entire harvest of a hot-house unintelligently distributed about a room. Half a handful of daffodils amid their green spears, loosely set in a long, slim, trumpet-shaped glass, very clear and fine, fulfil their decorative destiny worthily and well.

The motley, tightly packed nosegay of the past, —more like an ill-made mosaic than a company of living flowers,—now all but obsolete, was a marvellous leveller. No single flower was permitted to enjoy its own individuality ; all alike were crushed and ground down to the same decorative neutrality. But although we do not sin so uncompromisingly, we are prone to err with more pretension, and it remains to be proved whether the sheer obtuse brutality of the bygone method was really so very much more condemnable than the self-conscious solecisms of the new. To recognize that different flowers demand different manners of disposal, and different (if any) companionship, would seem to be one of the most obvious and elementary necessities ; and yet, to be sure, it is often enough ignored.

Short-stemmed flowers, flowers with no particularly distinctive silhouette, that look best in clustered masses, are, perhaps, the least facile to deal with. Shallow blue Nankin bowls make ex-



cellent receptacles for violets and for primroses, as do certain bronzes, provided they be not too deep. But for plucked crocuses the only adequate shrine that comes to mind is a graceful Japanese bronze incense burner, three-legged, and very shallow in the bowl. The cover is formed of a kind of trellis-work of ivy-stalks, berries, and leaves, through whose liberal interstices the amethyst and white chalices, with their saffron centres and small striped spears, stand up triumphantly after the habit of their growth. Some of the bronze Japanese flower-vessels are fitted with bars, so placed across the mouth as to hold sufficiently upright a bough in blossom. These cannot, of course, be bought at the ordinary Oriental emporium, but could, in all likelihood, be procured from more researched collections. They are eminently desirable possessions, for by their means you are enabled to give the character of the growth full play, and to display to best advantage the gracious curves and outlines of leaf and stem and petal. What in early spring could be much more pictorially pleasing than blossoming boughs of almond or *pyrus japonica*, set—always with due regard to their shape and direction—in one of these vessels? Then, a little later, there will be plum and apple-blossom, plucked when the branch is in bud, and breaking day by day to full flower, on your table, as you will. Later, again, come glorious opportunities afforded by the iris—purple, or amber, or freaked, pansy-wise, with both—by certain varieties of lily, of magnolia, and, last of all, by burnished autumn foliage, silver, copper, or gold.

The dark rosewood tulip-stands of last century (devised when the bulbs they were meant to enshrine were worth far more than their weight in gold), classical cup-shaped urns cut in bars to show

a brass lining, and supported on tall tripods, have mostly been turned to other uses; they entertain the patient palm and the dreary aspidistra; which seems a pity, for the old order was pleasing and appropriate enough. In clear glasses, whether white or green, but white for preference, tulips are a joy so long as they may last, unless perchance they open too widely; and in jars of blue and white Delft, genially globular above and tapering elegantly towards the base, they are perhaps more attractive still, with a charm of quaintness peculiarly Dutch. With tulips it is best to keep the colours separate, more especially with the striped sorts; anemones, however, are all the better for variety. You may mix deep purple, dark red, faintest pink, palest lilac, and silver white anemones all in one group with an effect more richly beautiful than a heap of gleaming gems or an old stained glass window with the spring sun shining through. It should be remembered that half the poetry of the wind-flower is lost by putting too many blossoms into the vase, for the stalk has (like that of the marsh marigold) a way of growing, as it were, in the water you have set it in, and taking, in the process, the most divine curves imaginable. Robust and yet delicate, strong and radiant with a most joyous and wonderful strength, it seems the very embodiment of youth and of spring. For lilac, which, like wistaria, demands to be disposed in masses, and a high vessel, the classic copper teapurn of the Georgian era is the ideal vase; it is readily adapted from its former *métier*, and presently, when the summer shall come, will show pre-eminently fair, filled with great white peonies. Wall-flowers, too, are best seen in large trusses, and for these you can find nothing better than an old copper wine-cooler.

Blue and white china punch-bowls, when not over deep, provide sympathetic shrines for cow-slips; so do the old green ginger-jars, so difficult now to come by, with crackle glaze, and low reliefs of birds and flowers. But if you are staying—in “furnished apartments” remotely—in the country, it may be of some solace to realize that a common glass pickle-jar may prove a far from uncomely vessel for woodland spoils. It is, to say the least of it, a welcome refuge from your landlady’s ornamental flower-vases.

Each morn a thousand roses brings in June, and not to the garden alone, but along the hedgerows and among the underwoods to boot. And not roses only, but an infinitely varied multitude of less-considered blooms—less-considered, that is to say, from any practically decorative standpoint—and yet worthy enough, in all conscience, when carefully plucked and heedfully disposed, to make unfashionably fair the chambers or the dinner tables on whose behalf they may be gathered together. The over-prevalent conception as to the arrangement of wild flowers is much the same as that which only too lately obtained with regard to the indoor disposal of more highly-differentiated growths—a blind conviction, namely, that flowers being in themselves things of beauty could do no wrong, even when mixed and mingled in such indiscriminate wise as to hurl defiance at every law, written or unwritten (and the last are the more important), of harmony and fitness.

We are come at last to recognize, partially it is true, but still to recognize—“one glimpse, if dimly, yet indeed revealed”—that it is a most unprofitable practice to cram as many garden flowers as possible and of as many different kinds and colours, into the same vessel; but the lilies of

the field are still, even when thought to deserve the trouble of carrying home and setting in water, used with scant ceremony and less taste. We are apt to treat them as something like beggars to whom a half-kindly, half-contemptuous alms is tossed in passing, or who are allowed to find some transitory solace at the back door. Snatched clumsily from the parent stem, with no regard for symmetry of leafage or proportionate length of stalk, borne homewards in the enervating grasp of hot fingers, and pushed "anyhow" into any kind of vase that comes handy, there is small matter for wonder that, as a general rule, the beauty of wild flowers is so sadly to seek when translated to the house.

And yet, with a very little thought, they are capable of much that is charming within doors as well as without. And although there is no lack of blossom and perfume of the cultivated kind, it may nevertheless be worth while to go out, upon occasion, into the highways and hedges for your table decorations if for nothing else. The enterprise is harmless, to say the least of it, and, if the grace of unfamiliar effects, of chords that you have not already struck a hundred times over, each summer, can be counted to you as righteousness, then there is something gained over and above the pleasure of experimenting with intrinsically attractive material.

So many different schemes are there as yet untried in any appreciable degree, such a multitude of pleasing potentialities to be evolved and materialized according to your individual imaginings, that specific suggestion might almost seem superfluous; but there are ever changes to ring upon the finest harmonies, ever fresh combinations to attempt, new intonations to essay, a different

sentiment to symbolize. Indeed, there is practically no limit in full summer-time and a flowery country, to the arrangements, all more or less commendable, to which the goodly company of wayside weeds will lend themselves.

The opaque pallor delicately stained with green, of the waxen wild bryony blossom, with its sharply-serrated leaves, its exquisite trails and tendrils full of vaguely classic sentiment—a veritable hedge Bacchante, as it were—is set off to a marvel by the golden dusk complexion, the simply subtle curves and romantic lines of old Japanese bronze. And this should suffice in itself—given, of course, appropriate guidance, without which the most promising composition must fall hopelessly to pieces. But if you should have set your heart upon fragrance as well as qualities of form and colour, none can reasonably quarrel with you for filling the very tallest and slenderest of your bronzes with a great sheaf of meadow-sweet and setting it in the midst. Again, a by no means unpleasing arrangement on a somewhat similar plan may be arrived at by means of the wild clematis—the same that passes the summer as Traveller's Joy, and tumbles down the vale of autumn as Old Man's Beard—disposed discreetly in bowls and vases of clear, pale-green glass. Here, again, the central trophy should be high, and for this you can hardly find anything more sympathetic than pure white foxgloves. As refined and researched an arrangement as heart could wish, and, at the same time, most easy to compass, is a profuse triumph of shell-tinted blackberry blossom set in vessels of iridescent glass; not, be it clearly understood, the ordinary iridescent glass of commerce, which, for all its soap-bubble sheen, makes appreciably for the commonplace, but that



admirable reproduction—fair with all the mysterious poetry of the opal, and lit with the same veiled fires—of the substance of the antique glass tear-cruses found in Etruscan tombs. Given the finest and whitest of fair linen, the most delicately frail old silver, and thin white china without spot or blemish, the effect as a whole has indubitable distinction, while the detail cannot fail to please.

“Do not,” says the poetess, “chew the hemlock rank, growing on the weedy bank,” and there is little temptation to disregard her kindly warning; you may, however, compose a very ethereally pretty dinner-table decoration from the frail white umbels with their innumerable tiny blossoms and tender green stalks that flourish, in all manner of sizes, on grassy banks and beside the hedgerows. To these you may add, with liberal but judicious hand and distinct advantage, long-stemmed blooms of the scabious in all its subtle varieties of tone and quality, ranging from faintest violet to dull, rich purple. For this arrangement the best vessels are of airily fantastic, yet not too elaborately fashioned, Venetian glass, chiefly white, but throwing out dim, well-subordinated suggestions of pale green, and blue, hovering on the verge of purple.

The almost austere simplicity of the sweet-scented white campion claims, when obtainable, the pearly tones of old pewter as a shrine—or else, for second choice, vases of pure white Dresden; and, if it seems to need companionship, the small gold stars and dark leaves of the St. John’s wort might justly be deemed fit to bear it company.

Before the high tide of the year the dog-violets have had their day, together with many another early summer flower; and still, despite their scentlessness, the remembrance of an oval breakfast-table half-paved with these, set close together in

shallow chalices of old blue glass, whose blunt lapis-lazuli diapers were patterned with dim gold, still lingers an agreeable memory, and one fraught with promise of future symphonies in purple and blue. The briar-rose and the sweet-briar beside, it were best to gather in bud, so soon do the full-blown blossoms fall, and for them, as for other flowers (but roses always more particularly), forethought will add a few drops of sal-volatile—it is better than salt—to the water they are to stand in, thus prolonging to the utmost the freshness which is their life. And for these wild roses any manner of glass, provided it be of pure design, rather low than tall of build, and either faintly green or else colourless, may serve. They will show, moreover, to equal advantage in daintily sprigged or garlanded, or in fine blue and white, china bowls.

The cool glories of water-lilies, yellow and white, are too well appreciated to touch upon here, save to deplore that the vessels they are set in are never, or hardly ever, of adequate dimensions. It is pitiable to see them, in their large and lordly beauty, languishing in puny glass troughs like a swan in a wash-tub; and, indeed, it seems more than doubtful as to whether from their very nature, and the sentiment of their association, they are suited to serve as table or indoor decorations at all.

Suppose a house with an enclosed courtyard, flagged with white stones between which the grass is growing, and there in the centre a tank of dull, yellow marble, and you have a fit home for the domesticated water-lily—that and none other.

At the first blush the discredited and generally odious *épergne* appears to have outlived its uses altogether, and this, of course, must still hold good of the intrinsically meaner kinds; but, the

freaks of fashion notwithstanding, there are some examples left of almost classically elegant design, in Sheffield plate and finely-cut glass, to which honour and preservation are due. Such a one, filled with closely-massed bell-heather and its natural green, airily crowned with the long slim stalks and drooping grey-blue heads of hare-bells, has found its best fulfilment. Slender, trumpet-shaped glasses holding hare-bells, in number proportionate to the size of the table, should complete the effect.

“The world,” says an old saw, “was never so dull, but if one won’t another will;” and when the rose of yesterday is all but forgotten, when chrysanthemum sheaves stand ephemeral monuments of desolation, blackened and forlorn, and the garden is “a sealed seed-plot” which only faith can glorify in advance, what should you do but go for consolation to the next best that offers? From the early spring flowers that even before Christmas are hawked abroad in the streets, you turn with a shiver, for of all unseasonable wares these anticipatory blooms would seem the least in harmony with the spirit of this moribund time of year, and the least desirable. And, besides, their pale presence forestalls—discounts, as it were, in some measure—that thrill of vague unreasoning hopefulness, of foolish exhilarating anticipation, that comes with the first real spring day. You should never buy your first bunch of rose or purple anemones, of white, faintly-fragrant narcissi, or yellow jonquils, until the air has the moist breath of spring in it, and the sun’s gold is the veritable gold of spring.

It is easy, of course, to have a few bowls and vases for ever going with hot-house flowers. But what of the multiplicity of vessels, short and tall,

rotund and slender, that are left naked to laughter when leaves fall and cold winds come?—those vessels set on side tables, in odd corners, and on chimney-pieces, overflowing with flowers for three parts of the year in the pride of plenitude, in winter lorn and disconsolate. They are mostly crowned for a few days in mid-winter with holly and yew, with mistletoe and laurel, but that is merely for the moment, and soon the accustomed tenantry of each will oust the Yuletide usurpers and come to its own again, with, perhaps, some change of grouping and shifting of place, according to the inspiration of the disposer or the exigencies of the background.

It is given but to very few to keep their out-lying jars and flower-vases in fresh blossoms throughout the winter. Indeed the sentiment of the season forbids it, inclining rather to sympathetic alliance with those gracious phantoms of summer growth which you may have, mostly for the plucking, in autumn, and may now and again, if you have missed your chances then, purchase of the street-hawker later in the year. They are wraiths, of course, void of scent and bloom, but yet the fairest and most decorative of spectres; “like ghosts of pilgrims that have died around the Holy Sepulchre,” they haunt the grave of every summer that is born and has perished, paying tribute, and bearing witness to, its splendours overpast. They are ready to step into the breach with their armoury of fragile charms on the very emergency at which they are most needed: comely and pleasant were they in their lives, and in death they are not unhonoured.

Indeed, the last state of the Honesty, with its decorative, almost Japanesque, wealth of shimmering pearly moons, hung on frail stems, and stitched,

as it were, here and there round the edges with a delicate dark thread, is far more distinctively beautiful than its first—dainty though the clusters of lilac blossom can be. In the early summer, a little after the daffodil and a little before the iris, a few clumps of Honesty in full flower stand up bravely between the late tulips, making an amethystine mist of bloom very pleasant to the eye; but the supreme moment of existence is when, the high seeding stage, dreary and dissipated-looking, being past, the tall, whitish-grey stalks are cut off close to the ground on some still autumn day before the rough weather begins, and careful thumb and finger strip off the dun-coloured casings that cover either side of the iridescent discs, and let fall the flat round seeds. You must not forget, however, to humour the plant in this process of unveiling its inner mysteriousness, for the delicate film is only too easily torn or broken off, being as brittle and as unchancy to handle as most other things of beauty, real and ideal.

Once safely stripped and set in its appointed place, a cluster of Honesty will last through a winter, even a London winter, in grace and comeliness. As for the receptacle, it matters little what it may be, provided only that it is good in form and colour, and not too low of stature. A Delft or Nankin jar, a slender tapering pitcher of bronze, an old cloisonné vase with rich dusky blues and vermilions, in all or either this delectable weed will show to advantage if judiciously disposed, without overcrowding and with due regard to the structural character of every spray. If the Honesty harvest have yielded well, and you can afford to be generous, one of the prettiest arrangements in the world may be arrived at by crowning a Georgian copper tea-urn with its shell-like whiteness. The



combination is particularly happy, and shines forth from a shadowy recess like a good deed in a naughty world.

Less easy to arrange, by reason of its habit of growth, but charming all the same, is the Cape Gooseberry, as it is commonly called, whose miniature Japanese lanterns of a translucent orange-red, sometimes full, sometimes delicately faint in colour, dangle in distracting disarray from their slim supports. For this a narrow-necked vessel, be it metal or china—glass is obviously out of the question in the case of all these dried braveries—were advisable ; or else, and this depends entirely upon the position they are to occupy, you may let them trail from a shallow goblet of not too insignificant proportions.

The common flag, after it has “come to full flower-time,” and ripened in due course, makes a fine harmony with its tall seed-pod, where the brown sheath draws back like a split pomegranate to disclose the large seeds of a luminous red ; and with this it is well to intermingle pale banners of the dried spear-grass and wavering sedge. It is just possible that in some remote period to come, generations yet unborn shall rise up and call the bulrush blessed. At present the wrong is too recent, the abominations that have been wrought in its image are too often in evidence for appreciation or even for ordinary justice. Milking-stools, umbrella-stands, plaques in terra-cotta, door panels, and the like, conspire to cast contumely on this innocent vegetable, as mercilessly maltreated by the amateur as the sunflower and the stork.

Happily the homely attractions of the honest, and most decoratively valuable teasle, have not been turned into a reproach by zealous misrepresentation ; it is as welcome as ever to a place of

honour in the larger and more robustly fashioned of our vases. In the immediate neighbourhood of delicate porcelain it needs not to say that the teasle, even as pampas grass, were out of place; neither, and equally, of course, must it be implanted in a small or meagrely-proportioned vessel; its bold outlines and rugged growth demand a spacious and not too finely detailed shrine.

Most to be shunned of all so-called *immortelles* are the odious dyed grasses, "selected" bundles of which are shamelessly offered for sale. They are the visible expression of tastelessness and vulgarity, on the same level, so to speak, with sham begonias in flower-pots and camellias carved in turnip. And while there are opportunities, so many and sweet, for justifiable selection, there can be no excuse whatever for the existence of such monstrosities as these. The smallest of small beech boughs, such as grow low on the saplings, are easily attainable, and if gathered at the right time, and not over often disturbed, will often keep their copper-gold leafage until the spring. Dried fronds of bracken, too, are admirable in effect, either together, or when their russet warmth of colour is closely contrasted with the pale sheen of the Honesty.

In some of the down countries you may find growing near the sea a pleasing variety of umbels, very graceful and fantastic, while on the short turf not far away from the hedges that harbour them grow the short-stemmed thistles, like transmuted moon-daisies with large round centres of tawny amber velvet, and hard, silvery petals curled backward. Here, again, but lower down and nearer the shingle, grow grey sea-thistles. But it is near the scant shelter of the hedgerows above that you must seek the tall, slim weed that boasts of so

graceful an array of drooping, pitcher-shaped seed-vessels, as refined in form as Greek vases of the best period.

“Red rose-leaves will never make wine,” but the coral-coloured, pear-shaped fruits that remain on the briars will serve, in company with dried walnut or plane-leaves, in bronze dishes, to render a winter dessert very fair to see. Walnuts, pears, and apples, to say nothing of oranges and grapes, are outwardly and exceedingly glorified by juxtaposition with such wild wood spoils.

## CHAPTER XI.

CANDLESTICKS ; LAMP-SHADES ; MENU CARDS ; LINEN.

“ HAVE you,” asks a modern humorist, in a pleasant pastiche of the Ollendorffian method, “ have you seen the boy with the golden candelabra ? ” We forget the prescribed reply, remembering only that it was something vague and at the same time antithetical, entirely out of sympathy with the sumptuous suggestions evoked by the query. Of boys there is a multiplicity (some would say an overplus) ; but golden candelabra of fair design are few and far between, unless we accept synonymously, as well we might, that metal, to all intents and purposes even more decoratively valuable than gold—brass, to wit—from which so many admirable candlesticks and candelabra have been fashioned.

The romance of the candlestick, golden or otherwise, remains imperishable and indestructible even in these days of developed mechanical contrivance and active innovation ; it may be in some measure enhanced by a flavour of superfluity, now that gas and electricity have proved so comprehensively accommodating to the most insignificant needs. These furnish forth the prose of artificial illumination, but the poetry of it—save in the streets, of course—is still vested in candle-light. With or without shades, but perhaps without for preference, there is no kindlier, mellower lustre than that

which radiates from the flame of a waxen candle, excepting, it needs not to say, the light produced by natural agencies. Lamps are all very well in their way—that is to say, they are useful exceedingly, and capable, moreover, of a high degree of comeliness; but when the light of the sun and the



CANDLESTANDS, BY HEPPLEWHITE.

moon and the stars is darkened, and the fogs return after the rain, then is there no kind of illumination whatever that has half the charm of innumerable tapers set in appropriate positions, and fitly sconced. How far the spell of association may take part in this effect it were difficult to decide, but the quality of the light is undeniably refined and delicate; while the relief of finding not every



nook and corner, every plane and detail, searched out and blazoned forth with disenchanting distinctness, is in itself a boon.

The dim, irreligious light diffused by shaded lamps is prone to be now *triste*, now raffish, and sometimes both at once, but the radiance of good wax-lights, judiciously disposed, can hardly fail to please by its chaste gaiety, its urbane discretion. It is instinct with stately reminiscences and present ameliorations; kind for the elderly, becoming for the young, the candle is worthy of its shrine. Curiously enough, there is a multiplicity of excellent candle sconces, both old and new, yet mostly of old design; that there are no more than two or three main motives, it is true; but the variants on these are so subtle and so artistically ingenious that monotony is out of the question. Most gracefully proportioned is a tall iron candlestick of the early Gothic period. A long, slender stem, terminating in a broad base and three outspread feet below, and above in an elegantly-shaped knob, forms a support for the candle-holder itself, which, with its little platform, fashioned something after the image of a nasturtium leaf, is made to slide up or down at the will of such as may chance to use it.

A Japanese candlestick, of remote antiquity, follows, in essentials, the same lines. It is, perhaps, less finely-proportioned; the spike at the summit on which the taper is impaled seems a little heavy in effect for the spire that leads up to it. But the detail is a marvel of metal work, the fundamental bronze being inlaid in silver with intricate devices of fans and swirls of water, and the whole chased again with an elaboration that, by reason of its artistic excellence, is yet not laborious. And here, too, are the small and leaf-like platforms encircling and decorating the slender

stem. Another example of antique Japanese work is a pair of bronze candlesticks, very original in conception and fine in effect. These also are spiked at the summit, but the structure is entirely different; it simulates (but with beautiful austerity of translation) the net of a fowler, drawn up to its narrowest limits, and spreading gradually downward, in only such gentle gradation of line as is at all compatible with the existence of a curve, to the broad base. The meshes, contracted at the top and stretched wide below, form an interesting and a graceful pattern. Of comparatively modern make is yet another pair of bronze candlesticks from Japan, wrought in the semblance of lotus blossoms, with their stalks and buds; the treatment is to some extent realistic, but still eminently decorative, and in no way tending to triviality.

The columnar motive is one of the best, and, strange to say, the most commonly insisted upon, designs, in all manner of shapes and sizes, in all kinds of metals, from pewter to ormolu. It is capable of endless variations both of form and ornament; it ranges from grave to gay, from lively to severe, and seldom, indeed, does it happen that the variations are played out of tune, or that the grace of the original conception is wholly lost sight of. Decoratively speaking, it is a dangerous thing to meddle with mixed metals, but the effect of silver columns adorned with perpendicular lines of copper beading, very fine and delicate, together with an infinitesimal floral pattern in the same material, is unquestionably successful. Here, too, are the qualities so sadly to seek in some modern experiments in candlesticks of combined metals, that look more fitted to flaunt it on a Christmas tree than to withstand the tender mercies of neat-handed

Phyllis—the qualities of solidity and resistance by no means incompatible with the first elegance.

How stately, and how practical are the tall old candelabra of silver, or Sheffield plate, with their firm structure, their classically-inspired schemes of ornament—garlands, ox-skulls, festoons, flutings, and all. And between the reproductions of these and their originals there is really little, if anything, to choose, so finely conceived were the old, so cleverly copied are the new. This type of candlestick has been reproduced of late years over and over again, and is not one whit the less delightful for familiarity; but it is to be regretted that no one has yet found it in his heart to popularize some of the admirably-designed antique examples of early Gothic inspirations that hail from Holland.

These are mostly of brass; and the manifold changes that are rung on square and circular mouldings and spherical projections, together with the almost invariable justice of proportion observed throughout, bear fresh witness to the decorative genius of the Dutch. Among the most interesting candelabra of this kind is one with a deep, bell-shaped base, curiously ringed about and reeded, culminating in a trinity of sconces—a central spike to wit, flanked on either hand by a hollow receptacle that inclines, ever so slightly, outward.

Florid, but vastly pretty withal, and invested with a certain quality of stateliness peculiar to their period, are the Louis XV. silver candlesticks, elaborately embossed with floral designs, and wreathed variants of the volute. It is interesting, moreover, to mark how this period, too, had its prototype in the Lowlands of Holland: the old Frisian versions of Louis XV. fashion are a very

little heavier in design, but show the self-same spirit, the identical patternings.

Generally speaking, the adaptation of the human form to candle-holding, whether in bronze or any other metal, is a blunder and a shame ; and which are basest, the obese Cupids and smirking shepherdesses who uphold in urn or basket the waxen load, or the deplorable grotesques of Griset, it were difficult to tell. Only in some grandiose creations that took shape in that golden age of ornament, the time of the First Empire, is this successfully done ; austere bronze nymphs in classic draperies stand tiptoe on golden hemispheres—which again are supported by green marble pedestals engarlanded with gold—and bear in outstretched hands clusters of gold sconces. And this is dignified enough, despite the liberal use of ormolu, for the design is decoratively conceived, and the humanity so conventionalized as to be practically rendered nil.

The candlesticks designed by the illustrious *animalier*, Barye, although distinctly noble in their way, are far less expressive of his decorative powers than is his work in general, and his clock in particular. Perhaps there was less opportunity for a fine silhouette. For the motive chosen is a leafless tree-trunk, in the forked division of which sits a pheasant, most majestically modelled ; perhaps, too, this design would come better in silver than in the *verde antique* bronze that now embodies it.

The philosophy of the lamp-shade is as complex and as full of contradictions as the Muse of the Mode herself. You may lay down seemingly incontrovertible principles condemning this, approving that, disparaging the other, and yet be snared of a sudden by some charmingly meretricious combination, some unreasonable arrange-

ment that "'twere lunacy to love," and straight-way fall to forswearing and recantation—for the time being at least. The thing of its very nature is ephemeral, and thus it is hardly surprising that your ideals thereof should be whimsical and short-lived too. Of course, and in despite of this law of inconsistency, there are certain abominations that no witchery of juxtaposition, no gaiety of treatment, could render alluring or even tolerable. And of these the most entirely offensive are such as fail through a bold festivity of intention that simulates *chic*, that grasps at quaintness, and produces dullness reeking with vulgarity, in like manner as a *café chantant* song might fall from the lips of Mrs. Albert Grundy.

Fantasy, in a lamp-shade, is one of the cardinal, though not indispensable, virtues; but the impotent attempt is worse than futile, and makes for its deepest damnation. The heads of owls, or of cats, fashioned in crimson paper, with eyes of another colour for the light to shine through; silk shades meaninglessly be-ruched and be-flounced like the worst gowns revived by the uttermost rag-bag of a season; blowsy, over-blown simulacra of flowers made in paper, monstrous of size, unpleasant of hue, these and such as these are obviously out of court from the first. Nor is the lace-covered variety very much better: it has its own peculiar powers of erring and of offending the eye; albeit, against all reason, there comes to mind an entirely captivating vision of a plainly flounced pavilion of pale, dull blue silk, veiled with pearl-coloured lace wherethrough the light filtered with an illusion of moonshine. But this was an exception—one of the freaks aforesaid. The ordinary lace-trimmed lamp-shade has too much in common with that rickety pretender, the lace-trimmed dressing-table



of other days ; it savours somehow too strongly of tawdriness and the *décrochez-moi-ça*.

Safe and in many ways desirable are the unadorned shades of fluted Indian silk, plain or softly flowered, stretched on frames of brass or copper to match the parent structure. If the colour be well chosen the effect is unpretending and agreeable, with a certain charm of dainty austerity ; and, besides, the silk may be changed as often as you will without delay or difficulty. In the matter of colour there is little else to choose between but red and yellow, but even here there is room and to spare for infinite error. The all-too-common crimson, with its vague suggestions of raffishness, of the not absolutely reputable, enjoys false favour on the score of a spurious benevolence to such as may sit under it. Never was illusion less well-founded. The strong, harsh quality of the colour, producing a species of lurid gloom, has a hardness in its shadows, an unpleasing irradiance in its lights, that destroy all that is subtle and pure in flesh-tints, and even accentuate furrows.

Real rose-colour, too, is by no means a flattering medium for artificial light. But there are four or five different shades, ranging from apricot to salmon, from puce to ashes-of-roses, that are good in themselves, and felicitous in effect ; while there is hardly a yellow in existence that may not be blamelessly pressed into service. Strong orange should be avoided, although the employment thereof is not necessarily a crime ; maize, on the other hand, is over-insipid for the purpose, and thus, perhaps, even less desirable. Meanwhile, there are tones of amber and of gold, tawny or delicate as your rooms, or the occasion, demand, whereof the variety is infinite, and which may be trusted to deal gently with complexions and decorations alike.

Perhaps, however, this problem of colour has never been quite so satisfactorily solved as by the somewhat kaleidoscopic, but altogether delightful, broken tones and motley hues of the simple sheath-like shade made, by the Japanese, of crinkled, crape-textured paper, ornamented with delicate stencillings. Pink, carnation, green, and white mix and mingle in decorative floral patternings; or the scheme may hold another chord made up of blue, vermilion, and green on the usual white ground, wrought into charming intricacies, and still be harmonious. But all are delightful, making a chamber illuminated through their soft confusions of colour, not all out of touch with Aladdin's enchanted garden hung with jewelled fruits.

Straws show the way of the stream, and in like manner, the merest detail of the dinner table may be expressive of taste or the want of it. Now and again you will find a fairly consistent and harmonious arrangement with no appreciable note of discord; flowers, china, glass, silver, all with a certain element of agreement, each chosen with a view to some more or less subtle relation of one to another. Not, be it understood, in the common sense of an obvious "match"—that unfailing resource of the timid, the inept, and the indifferent—but rather, as it were, with an instinct for diverse points, either of contrast, or resemblance, to be accentuated or toned down; for repetitions of form and colour to be sought or avoided, and, above everything, with a feeling for the decorative effect of each separate item with regard to the whole.

A very pleasing instance of discrimination was lately shown forth on an oval table, set for a small number of guests; the silver, which played rather a prominent part, was Dutch, and of some

antiquity; the glass, rather rotund as to its general outline, shared vaguely in the same characteristics as the silver; in the centre stood a large, low bowl of blue and white delft, filled to overflowing with pink roses, while here and there stood smaller vessels of the like make and colour, holding clusters of the same flower. The menu-cards were printed on a plain white ground, delicately besprinkled with slightly raised pink rose leaves; the name-cards were shaped after the semblance of single petals. Absolutely simple, with nothing to offend, putting forth no blatant claims to distinction, this unpretentious little arrangement remains in the memory as a thing so good of its kind that it could hardly have been bettered. And there is so much, so very much, you would fain forget, that even a moderately agreeable impression gains—and disproportionately perhaps—by force of contrast.

Menu-cards and name-cards, being of no very obvious importance, are to be numbered among the worst snares for the unwary dinner-giver; they are not unseldom chosen hap-hazard at the last moment, with never a thought for the exigencies of their environment, and with little demand for grace or fitness. Only let them be new, and invested with the sickening realism that has been for all time past the bane of decorative invention, and they are certain of favour. And yet, as an otherwise attractive toilette may be ruined by the introduction of an ill-placed ribbon or a discordant note of colour, so the comeliness of an otherwise carefully-laid scheme of table decoration is often jeopardized—nay, marred beyond redemption—by rows of inanities in coloured pasteboard or paper, misshapen into the semblances of various natural, and inappropriate, objects. Name-cards imitating

with horrid verisimilitude chips of bark, may disfigure an otherwise hospitable board, while another groans under the vulgar tyranny of menu-holders in the form of obese arum lilies, wellnigh as large as life, and far more fatuous. And the charms of a third—delicate crystal, fine linen, and all—suffer eclipse from an irruption of monstrous hazel-nuts split down the centre to exhibit the bill of fare writ large upon the discovered kernel.

And, were you unacquainted with the passionate yearning of the majority for all that is worst in decorative, as in pictorial, art, its *Schwärmerei* for the very tawdriest Cynthia of the minute, this deliberate mutilation of a fair effect would seem little short of amazing; for there is a plenty of really pleasing and pretty alternatives. You may choose for your menu, an you will, a clear white expanse, adorned at the four corners with the embossed counterfeit presentment of a single blossom—marguerites, pansies, or violets, whichever may find most favour in your eyes. Or you may give preference to another, and perhaps even a daintier variety, where the white ground is besprent, sometimes with delicate trails of flowers, sometimes with sprigs and loose petals, for all the world like an old china tea-service. Then there are pastiches in miniature of Louis XV. screens; delightful trifles with their gold or silver embossed borders wrought in courtly curves, full of an admirable artificiality, a stately levity that should go well in accord with the spirit of a feast.

Again, in the interests of simplicity and informality, it has occurred to some one to fashion small white scrolls, tipped with tenderest green and bedecked with a knot of narrow green ribbon, the colour of a daffodil stalk. And these last are pleasantly suggestive of a table not too large, of

courses not over many, convives fit and few, and set (say) by open windows with the green gloom of a country garden beyond.

As regards name-cards, large poppy-petals, delicately streaked with pale colour, and serrated at edge, may supersede the rose-leaf variety ; in autumn they have a seasonable grace, are sufficiently fair to see, and adequate for their chosen purpose.

So much for the better species of these frail commodities ; of the worst, the very worst of all, it hardly needs to say that they are numbered in the accursed company of the "hand-painted." Foolish flowers, preposterous fruits, inanely-pictured spaces—these, by comparison, seem almost tolerable when you consider the pestilent productions of the brush and pencil that are vended as something a little higher than those mechanically produced. For such as may wilfully let their choice fall on any of these there is indeed no hope, neither any remotest possibility of future artistic redemption. And if the buyer, who is perhaps after all a fitter object for sorrow than for scorn, be to blame, what shall be said of those by whom such offences come, the legion of lady amateurs for whose idle hands has been found the task of domestic disfigurement, miscalled decoration. Better far the manufacture of the crochet antimacassar, the comparatively blameless creation of wax flowers and fruit, for these were kept, as a rule, in the bosom of the family ; the harm they did died with them. Odious, but scarcely pestilential, they existed independently and unbeautifully, and perished in private. Your sisters, your cousins, and your aunts might indulge in their production, but were not wont to hurl the results at the world as marketable wares.



If life would be tolerable were it not for its pleasures, how much more so in due proportion were a house without its so-called ornaments? Sad that those refining evidences of a womanly hand, beloved by all clichédom, and especially by the novelist of commerce, should almost invariably take the form of bows where no bows should be, of "ribbons and bibbons" (in the words of the poet) "on every side," of fan and plaque-disfigured walls, to say nothing of a general murrain of hand-painting before which naught is sacred, and other infamies too many to enumerate, too tiresome to chronicle.

Sad, too, to think that the photograph plague, always grievous enough, should rage with by far the greater fury in homes whose presiding fairy happens to be of the less—decoratively—scrupulous sex. Photos, photos everywhere, would seem to be the watchword of the modern housewife—on the walls, the overmantel; on the countless "occasional" tables that bring the artless visitor to the borders of profanity, on the grand piano, on the protean but undying chiffonier. Only the chairs as yet remain uninvaded by that smirking or languishing company. And the sole spark of promise is that they have the saving excuse of perishability. But this will not bring us back the dainty miniature, the tender silhouette, the pleasant portraiture of days when likenesses were fit and few, and the card physiognomy of every casual acquaintance was not held in decorative esteem and shrined in a frame but a little less foolish than itself.

But, nowadays, there is no escaping the evidences of increased feminine activity: the jejune allurements of the lady decorator and her pupils assail you both at home and abroad, from countless shop-

windows as well as from your own domestic hearth. "Art at Home" is the Dweller on the Threshold brought up to date. Nothing is sacred to the amateur decorator, the more especially if she be a woman. Once she was content to glut the market with terra-cotta "plaques," vases, flower-pots, and other abominations in the same material; with rickety milking-stools and beer-barrel stands, sticky, uncomely, bedizened out of knowledge, and all hand-painted. Now she attacks with fury and at large; never a door-panel or an uncovered wall-space that is safe from her enthusiastic pencil. The mirror, of every size has long been her prey; but her most entirely heinous offence is the ruthless demoralization of old furniture, the defacement of what can ill be spared and may not be restored. Perhaps most true women are vandals at heart; the evidence at least seems to favour the hypothesis.

Once allow an unoccupied woman (and her name is legion) to suppose that she is imbued with artistic ideas, give her her head and some painting materials, and she will run amuck amid the simplest principles of taste, breathing destruction as she goes to all that crosses her path. It is but the first hand-painted article that costs, be it stool or cupboard or table; she will have tasted blood, as it were, and the craving grows with indulgence. From that moment whatever germ of an æsthetic conscience that may have lain dormant in her being is wiped out at once and for ever. She has been known in an excess of enthusiasm to paint posies of marguerites and red poppies across a Chippendale table; to insult a Hepplewhite chair with running traceries of yellow and white jasmine; to dishonour an oaken dower chest with storks and Christmas roses; there are no bounds

to her insolence. Is there not at this very moment a mute yet eloquent witness to her barbarity in the shape of a charming old rosewood music cabinet, most elegantly refined of form, admirable in colour—and she must needs have besmeared it with her absurd brush-work, fashioning a foolish and ill-wrought device upon its once fair front. 'Tis true, 'tis pity; but there's no help for it, unless perchance the hand-painting habit comes to be recognized at last as one of the dire diseases of the day, and a Home be instituted for the restraint and special treatment of its victims and the general good of the community at large.

And yet the feminine love of linen—a taste strangely pure and civilized—survives, in some degree, with almost all women, straying, like the Lady in Comus, unmoved amid the rabble rout of all manner of ugly and foolish fads and fancies. Perhaps no one has ever realized more fully than George Eliot the vitally important part once held by napery in a housewife's existence. Unhappy Mrs. Tulliver, with her spotted damask, "the pattern as I chose myself; and bleached so beautiful, and I marked 'em so as nobody ever saw such marking—they must cut the cloth to get it out, for it's a particular stitch. And they're all to be sold and go into strange people's houses, and perhaps to be cut with the knives, and wore out before I'm dead." Here you have a veritable tragedy, and none the less tragic for its unheroic proportions. For it is the grotesquerie of small familiar details that makes for real pathos; the absurd antitheses of everyday routine, the foolish obsession of inanimate things, at once piteous and laughable, that lend the keenest pang to a crisis. Indeed, it were difficult to over-estimate the intimacy of the relations between ourselves and

what, for want of a better word, may be called our setting. Like hermit crabs we gather round us a medley of objects, present and recollected, that become almost a part of our personality.

The pattern of a carpet, the curve of an armoire, the mellow auburn gloss on a panel of old mahogany, the amber lustre of a satinwood table, may mean almost as much to such as are in possession of developed senses as a familiar face or landscape. The absolute housewifely sentiment, as typified by Mrs. Tulliver weeping over her linen-chest and her best china, is all but extinct even amid the *petite bourgeoisie* of to-day; possibly, its decline has been something due to Oriental cheap labour in the form of twopenny fans, flimsy draperies, and low-priced Japanese faïence. But an instinct not all unakin to that homespun cult is with us yet. Renaissance or survival—in all likelihood the first—wherever it may chance to be, the trend towards decorative excellence in details, is growing stronger and more marked, for all the luxuriance of laidly “novelties” and debased objects of “bigotry and virtue” sown broadcast and flourishing in vicious prosperity throughout many an otherwise innocent household.

The old-time worship of the linen-chest, with all its dainty lavender-scented suggestions, was, as it were, the poetry of housewifery, and, of course, even as much other poetry, is obsolete as regards its wonted forms and observances; changing with changed conditions like everything else. Yet that we are still busy and careful over this once allportentous factor in a matron's life is proven by the distinctly appreciable improvement in designs for damasks that has lately come to pass. The gentle monotony of spot, sprig, and check in all their manifold variants is giving place to a wider

range of forms appropriately conventionalized for the purpose. The blowsy, nondescript flowers, with unlikely tendrils and impossible buds, are being gradually pushed from their post of vantage by harmonious arrangements, devised with artistic knowledge and a right feeling for shape and line, yet by no means devoid of naïve charm and spontaneity.

One of the first duties of a tablecloth is that it shall not be earnest; the occasion, the texture, the associations, all forbid any approach to solemnity of treatment in the design. A certain staid simplicity is perfectly permissible, nay, sometimes desirable, but aught heavy or pretentious should be shunned like the pestilence, or paintings on terra-cotta. A genuinely pleasing tablecloth has been designed by Mr. Lewis Day: the centre, or, rather, the full field of the cloth, is besprent with peacock and swallow-tail butterflies, the shapes whereof are admirably adapted and skilfully disposed; the border of conventionalized gloxinias falls in with the mood of the designer, fulfilling his purpose adequately, and in a manner, moreover, that is eminently agreeable to the eye. Another estimable design from the same hand is one compacted of pomegranates with a fig border, very large in feeling. While, again, there are several ably translated Renaissance designs, attractive, each after its own particular fashion of florid grace; and a very stately and elaborate transmutation of an antique Oriental design, which may or may not have been partially suggested by patterns on old Persian tiles. Not equally successful from the artistic point of view are the designs of Dr. Dresser. In all likelihood, and for this very reason, they may prove infinitely more acceptable to buyers in general, and to such as deem themselves possessed



of artistic tastes in particular. They are mainly a kind of bastard Japanese, and obvious with an aggravated obviousness that should delight the public at large, and cause a sick recoil to lovers of decorative art—decoration that is decoration, so to speak, art that is art. And, as they be few that understand or are concerned for real decoration, and fewer still for art—in the real, and not the shop-window sense, of either much-abused word—Dr. Dresser's designs are plainly to contribute to the greater happiness of the greater number.

With the higher development of the tablecloth has come the banishment of the table centre, that incongruous superfluity, either flimsy at one extreme or heavy at the other, whose infinite varieties have been all too long the joy of the suburban hostess, the beloved of the common æsthete. And the harmless, necessary sideboard cloth has not fared much better at the hands of the mode. From being distinct and apart from the tablecloth in all the separate glories of Russian cross stitch or lace, it has declined upon the far more fit and harmonious condition of matchdom with the greater expanse, being woven of the same designs and sold by the yard. To be sure, there are still a few worthy survivals in drawn linen and hemp with crochet insertion, but these are exceptions; the aforesaid safe dependency is the rule.

A pleasing change, too, has come over the spirit of the tea-cloth, a turn for freshness and clean daintiness of fabric that can only, perhaps, be thoroughly appreciated by those who have been on terms of intimacy with those multitudinous relatives of the chair-back, and lineal descendants of the antimacassar, in silks, crashes, towellings, workhouse sheetings—every inappropriate abomination wherewith the female heart has been tempted,

and that female fingers have assiduously covered with "art" broideries and bedevilments of every conceivable fatuity. Buttered toast and silk should not live together; coarse-textured materials may be no more congruously pressed into the service of so small a thing as the tea-table than a seal ring shall be carved out of granite, or a peony worn as a button-hole. A teacloth must, by the very nature of its office, be fine, delicate, and, above all, of an irreproachable cleanliness—a cleanliness that cries aloud. And these most desirable conditions can only be fulfilled in the highest degree by linen, or a judicious admixture of white linen and white silk. And this last, unlike most compromises, produces the happiest result of all; the mingled sheen of the two ingredients has a pearliness, an effect of refinement, that is delectable indeed; while the absolute unpretentiousness of tone and texture, the subtly delicate mazes of the small patterning, go to make up a small thing indeed, but perfect of its kind, and, therefore, worthy of no mean measure of praise.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE PIANOFORTE.

FOR a considerable lapse of years the pianoforte and its predecessors, however named, have been our national domesticated instrument ; and with every fresh year that comes to be added to the past the demand increases, spreading downward from class to class, and taking on the characteristics, so to speak, of a convention. There is little doubt, of course, that many entertain a sincere passion, whether educated or not, for music ; with a larger majority there is a cordial liking for it, much on the same sort of plane as may be the taste for tennis or drawing in water-colours. And, again, there is a multitude to whom some familiarity, however superficial and insensitive, with the art of the pianist stands for a symbol of social refinement. Why, it were difficult to define, but so it is. The significance of the gig standard has been altered—perhaps lowered—and the piano reigns in its stead. But increasing popularity, in its wonted way, has forgotten to bring with it anything of exterior comeliness. The modern piano, save in some rare isolated exceptions, is a mere music-box, offensive to the eye ; just as the modern villa is a mere living-box, and correspondingly unlovely of aspect.

The very name—as fatuous a piece of foreign clap-trap as was ever naturalized into a household

word—would almost seem to be justified by its sympathetic appropriateness to the average dull vulgarity of the case.

For, however the modern instruments may have improved in works during the course of the nineteenth century, they have most lamentably fallen from grace. Neither in form nor colour were it possible for the most indulgent and optimistic searcher after good to discover aught to commend. "Pearls are not whiter than his teeth," said the Prophet, of the spurned and execrated carcass of a dog; but the whiteness of new piano keys would form but a frail peg for praise.

The incorrigible "grand," with its gross proportions, its amorphous unwieldiness of bulk, its bloated legs, grotesquely indented with inadequate little ankles, like the fat lady in a country fair, seems wellnigh past praying for. It is only fit to mate with the toad-like ottoman of yesterday that used to squat in the centre of every respectable drawing-room; and to stand bedraped with art draperies, bestuck with photographs in hand-painted frames, a monument of decorative dishonour. And yet, surely, without too great a sacrifice of true inwardness, of mysterious excellences in the fashion of sounding-board and strings, this elephantine bulk might be remoulded nearer to the heart's desire, and reduced to some approximate elegance of form. At least the legs—those horrible legs—the original inspiration, perhaps, of the peg-top trouser—could be transmuted to comparative shapeliness. There is no lack of admirable models; and in any but ball or concert room the full capacities for noise—the shrill blare of the treble, the discomforting growling of the bass, when their sound is wrung out to the dregs—of an average grand piano seem greater than we can bear.

A slight modification in size, and a glance at a few fine old-world models, by way of suggestion as regards shape and ornament, would substitute for an ungainly monster an instrument decoratively pleasing, and sufficient in power and compass for all but professional pianists. The two extreme octaves of a full compassed keyboard are—artistically—superfluous. The one grunts, the other squeals. In neither does there abide any intrinsic sweetness or subtlety of tone. They are both, at worst, for sheer display ; at best mere pawns to be played in the intricate game of music too orchestral to be fitly attempted on any single instrument.

And here, or so it seems, lies the root of the whole evil ; the piano has taken too much upon itself of late years—would indeed, that some of the modern examples might share the fate of the legendary frog who wished to be a bull—and, in straining after illegitimate effects, has lost, together with its outer comeliness, not a little of its natural sentiment.

All the finest music bequeathed to the present by the past must have been composed on instruments of small compass ; and, while fully appreciating that which is good in the improved mechanism of recent developments, it is impossible to look without regret upon the ghosts of a beauty that is no more with us, or to feel convinced as to the incompatibility of outward with inner excellence.

Of the more gorgeous of those cases designed by Alma Tadema, and by Burne-Jones, there is but little to say. With all their costly elaboration, they failed of the right spirit, the poetry of music was not in them ; yet Andreas Rucker, of Antwerp, in 1651, knew how to embody it in the harpsichord which became the favourite instrument of Handel, and that is simple enough. Made of deal, japanned



black outside, with noble brazen clasps and hinges, inside it is coloured a dusky apricot red, patterned boldly with gold arabesques ; the under side of the lid bears two singularly well-chosen inscriptions in letters of gold. "Sic transit Gloria Mundi" is one, and "Musica Donum Dei" the other. While the sounding board—and this is one of the happiest characteristics in instruments of that period—is all besprent with painted birds and flowers, showing under the strings like a summer garden through a shower. In all likelihood it was from such an example as this that Burne-Jones drew the happy inspiration of his rain and ruin of roses across the sounding board of his more successful case. The elder craftsmen well understood the subtle sympathies that exist between music and colour ; and, however archaic their manner of expression may have been, they did express their sense of it as none has done since.

Who could instinctively associate rhythm and sweet sound with any piano of the Victorian era ? But these old instruments exhale, as it were, an atmosphere of music from every inch of detail, as well as from the impression of the whole. In no example is this spirit more fully made manifest than in a harpsichord dated 1655, and signed "John Loosemore, *fecit*." It is fashioned of black oak, and rests upon a carved trestle-stand of the same sombre wood. The lid is quaintly arched and decorated with long slender hinges, and the effect, when closed, is one of austere and sober reticence, that still further enhances the mellow beauty revealed when it is raised, and a veritable poem of rich, pure colour strikes upon the senses like a splendid chord. The keyboard and the notes form a harmony in russet and dusky gold—golden embossed arabesques and russet wood.

The inner side of the lid is painted—much as one air may change and melt into another—with a vague, dream-like, threefold composition, wherein the Garden of Eden merges into a broad river breasted by stately galleons, which, in its turn, is bounded by a green clearing in a forest with dogs and mounted huntsmen giving chase to a stag.

And the inside of the falling front takes up the wondrous tale with a strange melodious landscape bathed in late afternoon light, quaint to childishness, but in a way picturesque and full of romance, with its white sun-gilded town on the low hill beside the estuary; its foreground, so Flemish in feeling, where patient anglers, dwarf trees, and titanic turkeys and pheasants, all keep their places in a drowsy symphony of tone that seems fraught with infinite suggestion.

It neighbours, of course, almost on the impossible to possess a seventeenth or eighteenth century harpsichord; and even in such fortunate case it must be always a deeper delight to the eye and the imagination than to the ear. "The ghosts of half-forgotten things will touch the keys with fingers numb," but there are many moods from which its jingling harmonies would win little response, where-to its hoarse, pathetic voice would appeal in vain. But comparatively easy to find, and much to be desired, is the link, as it were, between the harpsichord and the piano of to-day, the narrow oblong instrument, either four or six-legged, of rich-hued mahogany, inlaid with marquetry of satinwood and harewood; with its amber satinwood keyboard painted with rosy garlands, and its penetrating sweetness of tone, somewhat remote, it is true, but so nearly akin to the remoteness of a blackbird's song heard in the grey early summer dawn, when you lie between dreams and wakening, from the

leafy depths of embowered green garden or dewy orchard, as only to add a charm the more. If, in addition to your conventional workaday piano of modern make you should chance to entertain, say, a Clementi, you may congratulate yourself on good fortune. For the music of Haydn and Pergolese, but, before all, for the happiest rendering of Völklied, those strange, single-hearted inspirations, eloquent of spring, and wet woods, and the fragrance of lost youth, there is no such perfect vehicle as one of these.

Among the rescue-worthy wreckage of the more recent past are the tall square-fronted pianos, flanked on either hand with Corinthian columns, and crowned with a dignified cornice, towering above the player with an almost organ-like effect, but with innumerable folds of finely fluted silk in place of majestic gilded pipes. They can boast but little real beauty, and their legs are only too often like the legs—but on a smaller scale—of the perennial modern grand. And yet they have a decorative charm of their own; their height is in their favour, and their effect in a sympathetically homely, unassuming parlour makes visibly for comfort not untinged with some quiet dignity.

As regards the cottage piano of commerce there is but little to be said. It is never delightful; although, here and there, and now and then, a tolerable example may be found. None of the numerous attempts to discover a better kind of case for it have been crowned with any real success. Too starved and unimaginative in its decent meanness was the essay exhibited in the Arts and Crafts Exhibition of 1893; while the so-called Sheraton (!) cases with their ugly conventional forms, their fulsome marquetry, sin on the opposite side of costly vulgarity, and seem but too

appropriate to the houses they live in. Better far is the ebonized musical box arabesqued with thin traceries of gold, that takes its inoffensive stand against the wall of the ordinary drawing-room. It is no better in design, but then it makes no pretence of being "artistic," and exists solely and avowedly for the purposes of the player. Should the uncomeliness of the walnut wood envelope to a sweetly-toned cottage piano prove greater than may be borne by an owner whose purse is shallower than his perceptions, there lies, within easy reach, a not wholly indefensible remedy. He may paint it white with a *mat* texture to the surface; of course replacing the fretwork front with a plain panel, athwart which may be flung, with advantage, swags, or festoons, of delicate painted roses, tied together with gaily fluttering love-knots.

A French cottage piano that was arrayed in richly embossed panelling of black and gold Japanese lacquer, only fails to please by reason of its form—the old familiar form with all the accustomed faults, of clumsiness and ineptitude, of which we are all so heartily weary. But to France must be given the credit of the ideal modern grand—a Clavecin Louis XV., of mellow Vernis Martin, pictured with enchanting idylls after the school of Lancret, supported upon seven slenderly graceful, and yet wholly adequate cabriole legs, and with the pedal addition so decoratively managed as not to appear out of character with the sentiment of the scheme. And why, after all, should not every grand piano take, on a humbler plane, example by this; be fashioned thus slenderly, even though of plain wood, and wear cabriole legs instead of the drop-sical turned atrocities that disgrace the drawing-rooms of to-day?

## CHAPTER XIII.

### ON BEDROOM FURNITURE.

THE fit plenishing of a sleeping chamber demands at least as intelligent consideration, as nice a sense of selection, as the composition of any other kind of nocturne, be it in words, in music, or in paint. A well-arranged bedroom, where comfort and good taste combine to live in unity together, is like the shadow of a great rock in a weary land, a place wherein to forget all things, to doff your will (and your worries to boot), as raiment laid away, and give yourself over to unconsciousness or the divine irresponsibility of dreams. It is, or should be, an enchanted castle, whence every night you may set forth, bound, now for the deep seas of forgetfulness, now for the vague, fantastic outlands that lie over the Mountains of the Moon, down the Valley of the Shadow. As you drift away, it is but meet and natural to demand that your last drowsy glances should fall on fair harmonies of form and colour, that your parting impressions shall be touched to pleasantness and peace.

The sentiment of a sleeping chamber has much in common with the poetry of a pleasaunce—the cloistral charm of high-walled gardens green and old; the spirit of seclusion, the habit of meditation, are there enthroned even more securely than in the library. Retired, the world shut out, all disquieting influences left behind upon the threshold,



the ideal bedroom may be to the sleeper what the cell is to the monk, the temple to the visionary. And in none is the dignity of sleep more majestically enshrined than in an ancient chamber that comes to mind—lofty and spacious, the walls panelled in oak, relieved with marquetry of black bog-oak and ivory-coloured hollywood. The diamond-paned lattice window, opening to the south, is made with a deep embrasure. In a far corner from the bed stands a great seventeenth-century armoire, of oak, like the rest of the furniture, to mate with the walls, sombre and nobly proportioned, suggestive of brocades and velvets contained within that would stand alone, and of all manner of antique braveries.

But the stateliest thing in all the stately room, and rightly so, is the bedstead of darkest, glossiest oak, planned in the grandest imaginable manner, and carved with a richness of detail characteristic of its period. It has, of course, the panelled tester proper to the time—the close of the sixteenth century—joining the head-board, but the foot-board is low, and the two posts that support the tester at the foot rise from massive square projecting pedestals about two feet high, in strange branching forms elaborately carved, and merging into a sphere, whence again rises a cylindrical column that reaches to the cornice—every portion is richly wrought, and, despite the bulkiness of the forms, the effect is as elegant as it is august. It is mainly to the decline of the tester, together with the substitution of trivial and prosaic methods for the fine composure of carved and inlaid wood, that the bedstead has, decoratively speaking, passed out of existence. The example of Og, King of Bashan, whose bedstead was an iron bedstead, has found too many followers; nor does brass, with its

restless glitter, offer any consolation whatever for the soothing and serene tradition it has displaced.

The arrangement in posts and rails, for all the world like park fences or area railings, that goes to make up the modern couch may be cheap, may be useful; heaped with "fleeces, and rugs, and fine flock of linen" it may to the material sense prove not all unluxurious—yet true luxury is founded on far more complex principles—it stands indubitably and unblushingly convicted of sanitariness, but it is void both of pertinence and of comeliness. You have, indeed, but to consider, however lightly, the ordinary accessories of life as it was, to realize the latter-day divorce of poetry from our material environments, of appropriate sentiment from furniture. We have symbolists, and more than enough, maybe, in literary and pictorial art; but the best sort of symbolism, that which wedded the use and the object, and gave a soul attuned to its occasion to every piece of plenishing, is dead, or sleeping so soundly that even the arts and craftsmen, shrill they never so strenuously in its ear, may not as yet prevail to awaken it.

Gone where the old moons go is many and many a fine fashion in furniture, and few were finer than the beds of the Tudor and Jacobean periods. Raised sufficiently, but not too far, above the level of the floor, roofed with the darkly shining symmetries of the panelled tester, upheld at the feet by tall, carved columns; sumptuously built in at the back by panelling, designed more or less like the reredos of an altar, they dominated the rooms in which they were placed in a manner worthy of their purpose. A beautiful Flemish example (dated 1626) of a small four-poster is amply suggestive of quaint elegance and romantic cosiness. It is delicately wrought and charmingly propor-





tioned, on a strait scale; narrow exceedingly, low to the floor, and not more than six feet in height altogether, high at the head and low at the foot. The head-board is carved with a representation of the sacrifice of Abraham, and the whole inlaid with marquetry of coloured woods. The French beds of this period and thereabouts are also fine instances of stately design and sumptuous craftsmanship; unhappily but few remain. An exquisite relic of later (and lighter) times—about 1750, to wit—the very materialization, as it were, of refined luxury and lordly ease, is a couch of carved and gilt wood, hung and upholstered in pale turquoise-blue brocade, patterned with trailing knots of ribbon and flowers. Wholly different from the commonly accepted design, it is shaped more after the fashion of a vast sofa, with a long cushion at either end, and the canopy in the centre of the back instead of at the head. The two ends and the back, turned something scroll-wise, are superbly carved with garlands and torches, while the four terminal pillars are shaped in the likeness of tall, slender quivers filled with arrows, the gimp and the fringes on the cushions and hangings being of gold. The whole thing has the glamour of a fairy tale. *La Belle au Bois Dormante*, or even *Gautier's Clarimonde*, might have lain her down to sleep in just such a blue pavilion as this.

Again, there is a Venetian bedroom “set,” of early eighteenth-century make, that for sheer opulence of design and colour might hardly be rivalled. Here the bed itself, again of wood, carved and gilded, is narrow in proportion to its length, the head and foot are comparatively low, and are decorated with a profusion of amorini, flowers, and scrolls, boldly devised. The same forms, in the same almost riotous gaiety, appear on the slim



high-backed chairs and the courtly little tables and cabinets that go to make up this group, the upholsteries and ample hangings of which are especially beautiful—they are of Genoa cut-velvet, with a Renaissance patterning in dusky and pale carnations, and greens of varying delicacy and dimness upon a pearl-white ground.

Of these, and such as these, were the beds of yesteryear, ornate but dignified, majestic though gay, pure in design and noble of structure, romantic as a play of Shakespeare or a novel of Dumas; dainty, sometimes, as a song by Herrick. Mainly to the substitution of metal for carved wood, and of textile fabric for the stately comfort of the panelled tester may be traced the absence of beauty and significance in the modern couch. Our new furniture is all too much akin to our minor prose, our minor verse, and the grand manner in decoration is no more with us.

For bed furniture and bed-spreads (better called quilts) there is ample scope for selection. Many of the chintzes and the damasks sold to-day are excellent facsimile productions from old designs; while less admirable, but still extremely good in their way, are the modern mediæval of the Morrisian school, inspired by the pictures in ancient herbals, and other sources of antiquity. There is, of course, a multiplicity of evil designs, coarse and sprawling, trivial and mean; but "among nine bad if one be good, there's yet one good in ten."

An antique Salamancan coverlet of coarse hand-woven linen might well be remembered for its distinctive charm; the design, where large flowing curves and lines, almost Runic in suggestion, are interwoven with archaic forms of birds, carnations, and hearts, is extremely impressive; in the colouring an extraordinarily refined variant of indigo

blue strikes the dominant note, and makes a fine harmony with pale tender greens and dusky pinks. Most desirable for a summer quilt were a faithful copy, in fine needlework, of some well-chosen old English, Spanish, Italian, or Persian model. All have peculiar graces of their own, while for winter there can be nothing more charming than the adaptation—which simply means bisection and a seam down the centre—of an old Dutch hoop skirt—such a one, for example, of yellowish white dull-textured satin, quilted with white silk in diaper of scale forms, is beautiful exceedingly. Failing that there is the grateful eiderdown, but you must have a very jealous care for the hue and design of its cover.

Next, perhaps, in importance to the bed and its draperies, are the clothes-presses where your garments are to hang or to lie in accordance with the exigencies of their structure. Of course, a supplementary closet, lined with brown holland and hooks, is required for the convenient bestowal of the overflow of feminine apparel; but for human nature's daily wear, kept ready to hand in the privacy of your own chamber, the principal receptacles are the great garde-robe or armoire, with its heavy doors, its vasty deeps, and the chest—the spacious coffer where your body linen lies in lavender. To be worthy of its mission, outwardly and visibly, as well as inwardly and spiritually, the wardrobe should be tall and capacious, conceived and proportioned on a grand scale, whether grave or gay, whether shaped more for elegance or for massive austerity.

The armoires of the Tudor and the Jacobean periods have a grave charm of their own—the charm, it may be, partly of antithesis, when the frail costliness of the contents is remembered, the

laces and ribbons, the furbelows and silks that are guarded by these solemnly-panelled portals. But they are architecturally fine to boot, and intrinsically impressive, apart from any sentiment, real or fancied, that may hang about them. Their dark façades gleam with infinite suggestion; but the least imaginative must admire the balance of their composition, the rhythmic selection of their forms. In another and a lighter vein, and none the less majestic withal, are some French wardrobes of the eighteenth century; and among these, for an effect of stately coquetry, there is nothing to surpass one made of carved oak. It is wide and of lofty stature, but scarce proportionately deep. The ornament is particularly graceful in design and refined in execution; it consists of a subtle arrangement of quivers and torches, intermingled with foliage, and all wrought in low relief. The arched top is surmounted by a mask crowned with feathers.

Again, an excellent instance of sweetness of line and strength of structure may be found in a press built on very similar lines but different in ornament. Here the relief is even lower, the design less exuberant, though still ornate, with the ovoid protuberances, the fantastic rococo curves and scrolls proper to the period. Of the elegant inlaid wardrobes of the Riesener and Chippendale schools many yet remain in excellent preservation, and as plainly distinguishable from the modern copies as the new, coarse, stained oak furniture, "made in Germany," is from its antique models. These are delightful with a separate delight; with a modified and chastened romance; a decrease in actual pomp; a predominance of detail over form. Far less grandiose in silhouette than their predecessors, they boast a polished courtliness of design and







finish that is eminently engaging. Mahogany, tulip-wood, amboyna-wood with its exquisite auburn tones, rosewood—these formed the most frequently-used foundations, and backgrounds, on which the delicate marquetricies of diversely-coloured and artificially stained woods were imposed, in various devices of floral garlands and posies, shells, classic urns, groups of musical instruments, festooned draperies, and so forth. The art of marquetry, as it was practised towards the end of the last century and the grey beginnings of this, embodied a refined and comely conceit, foreign, unhappily, from sheer necessity, to the spirit that pervades the productions of to-day. It is possible that by the time when all these survivals of the better-equipped past shall have ultimately crumbled and gone where everything good and bad must go at last, there may arise with altered conditions (if such there shall be), a new and regenerate school of furniture; something with vitality, that will reflect the feeling of the time in which it was brought forth, passing down as a not entirely unpicturesque record of the phase of thought and manners that begot it.

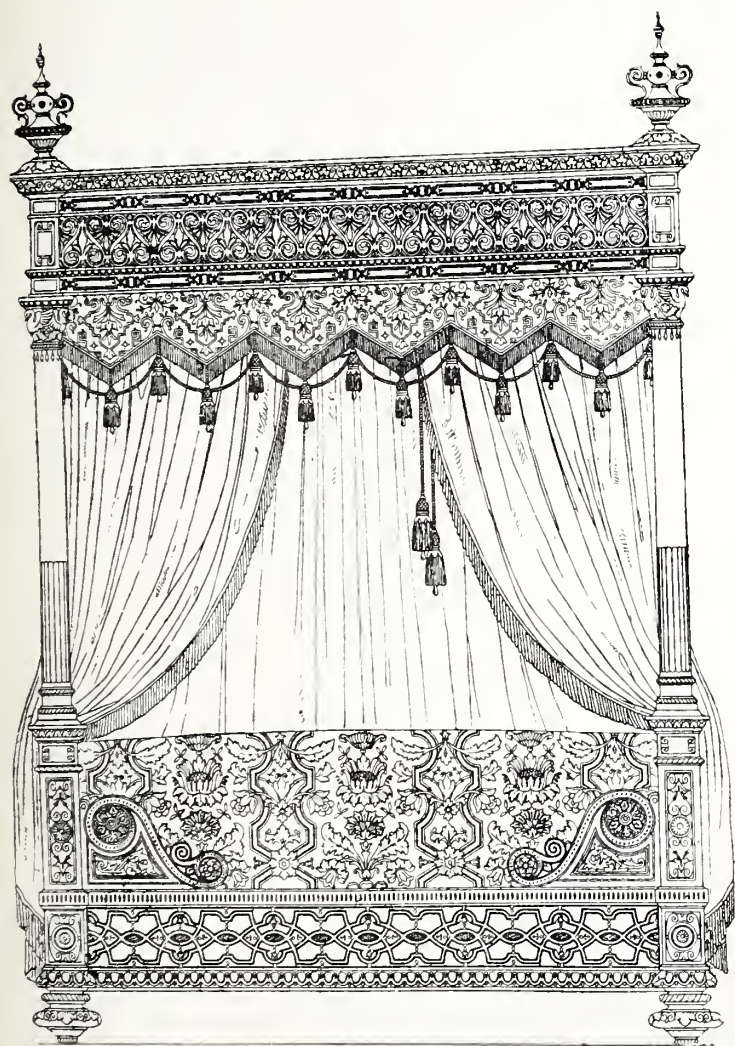
There is consolation of a colourless kind in the reflection that most likely, after the lapse even of a poor fifty years or so, but little will be left of our gimcrack modern chattels, our "art suites," our hand-painted impedimenta. Yet the great orgie of '51 has left almost indelible traces, traces that the process of time and change can alone obliterate, and that at a snail's pace. Ill weeds thrive apace, and the trail of the Great Exhibition, that very monster which gave birth to a longer-lived monstrosity, the Crystal Palace, is, decoratively speaking, over us all. It is for ever being disclosed afresh under some new form, and we who perforce

cannot wait to see the future, must cling to the skirts of the past, rejoicing that so much of the *vieux truc mais toujours bon* is left to us.

But if you must buy new furniture—and the necessity is not inconceivable—the one approximately original output of the present period in the way of bedroom furniture is the set made of stained green wood, with naïvely modelled brass or copper mounts. It is pleasing in form, well made, and has the great merit of simplicity.

Then there is choice among modern French reproductions of old designs, where you may find the stately four-poster of carved wood, the great carved armoire, and all. And again, to suit a certain kind of room, where an airy daintiness is the preponderating influence, there are white lacquered sets after the Louis XV. build, with ormolu mounts. And besides these may be reckoned an inoffensive, ephemerally pretty multiplicity of sets, enamelled in divers delicate tints, and often decorated, not amiss, with light traceries of eighteenth century or of Renaissance descent.

Never included with the modern series that is supposed to “furnish all we ought to ask” for our bedrooms; or, rather, dethroned by the more or less commonplace chest of drawers, is the once indispensable, and still most desirable, oblong coffer for holding wearing apparel generally, but linen for preference. Time was when the dower-chest formed a part of every bride’s equipment; less portable but more sightly than the Saratoga trunk, it fulfilled its different purpose with grace and dignity, passing down, moreover, as an heirloom from generation to generation. And even now if you would achieve the ideal bedchamber after the grand manner there must a chest be also. Easiest to come by are the old carved oak coffers of English



BEDSTEAD, BY E. LECONTE.



or Flemish make, some merely incised and panelled, others elaborately inlaid with marquetry of coloured woods, and often dated and initialled with figures and characters tersely eloquent of other times and manners. Sometimes, too, they were made of camphor-wood, inlaid with ivory and ebony, and sometimes of rowan-wood (sure safeguard against the powers of darkness); but whosoever may be so fortunate or so able as to secure an Italian cassone of the fifteenth century is the most cordially to be congratulated. Gilded and painted, carved or inlaid, these deep, narrow coffers, with their domed or panelled lids, their decorated fronts and sides, would seem to be veritable records of romance, irresistibly convincing, mysteriously reminiscent, like the echo of an old song, or the fragrance of a rose shut in a book. Something of the perfume of the best tales told by Boccaccio, the stateliness of ancient life, when life was at its stateliest, haunts them, stirring the fancy to all manner of strange realizations that simulate memory, and are partly pleasure and part regret.

One cassone in particular—although only one among many such—has the front carved in low relief, filled up with stucco, painted and gilt. The subject set forth is a procession of knights and dames meeting; the knights, some of whom are playing on lutes, while others bear gifts in their hands, are a short-cloaked, joyous little company, slim and courtly. The group of noble dames, in their long, trailing draperies, is an exquisite presentment of old-world feminine dignity and graciousness. Another cassone fashioned after the same principle is adorned with a somewhat similar “marriage procession,” of rare decorative beauty; and here, as in the first, the rich, jewel-like colours, dimmed with the lapse of years—seen, as it were,



through a mist of gold, like a landscape lit by the last low rays of the sun—appeal to sense and imagination alike. These, and such as these, are all that remain to us of pageantry in the true sense of the term, and perhaps they may be—who knows?—the better part. But the Italian dower-chests are not all painted and gilt, although those are the more supremely attractive. Some are of carved and inlaid wood, frequently of cypress-wood, whereof one example comes readily to mind as worthy, despite its sombre habit, to be remembered and desired; it is of medium proportions and graceful shape, with incised decorations representing the Judgment of Solomon and the Adoration of the Magi.

As regards the mural decoration of the bedroom, you must needs be very materially influenced by the *genre*, so to speak, of the chamber, be it a matter either of choice or necessity; do you deliberately choose the character, or is it forced upon you by circumstances. For there are two distinct species of bedchamber, both good, though one is stateliest and best, and this (naturally) is the hardest to compass; while the other effect, which merely makes for daintiness, is—if, like friend Mitis, you have “a true taste in household decoration”—by no means difficult of achievement. It hardly needs to say that to the first belong the more massive and majestic order of bedstead, the deep and lofty armoire, the richly-painted and gilt cassone, or the carved dower-chest—all the *haute noblesse* of bedroom furniture; among which, by the way, it must obviously not be forgotten to include the guéridon, or torchère, either sumptuous in carved and gilded wood, or severely ornate in curiously wrought and beaten metals. For the walls of a room thus furnished the first choice lies



AN EMPIRE CRADLE.



between old tapestry or wood panelling, and which of these two may be the better it were hard indeed to decide, so finely appropriate are both, so evenly balanced their individual attractions. Perhaps the scale weighs ever so slightly over in favour of the first—the old arras, “rich with huntsman, hawk, and hound,” with its enchanted underwoods and meadows, its unearthly populace, its dreams within dreams. The colours, faint, and yet mellow with an afterglow of change, melt one into another with the very poetry of repose, of shy suggestion, elusive, mirage-like, and still infinitely soothing. The vague folds hanging from ceiling to floor shut out the world effectually with a world of their own, and yet convey no sense of imprisonment or of tyrannical restrictions.

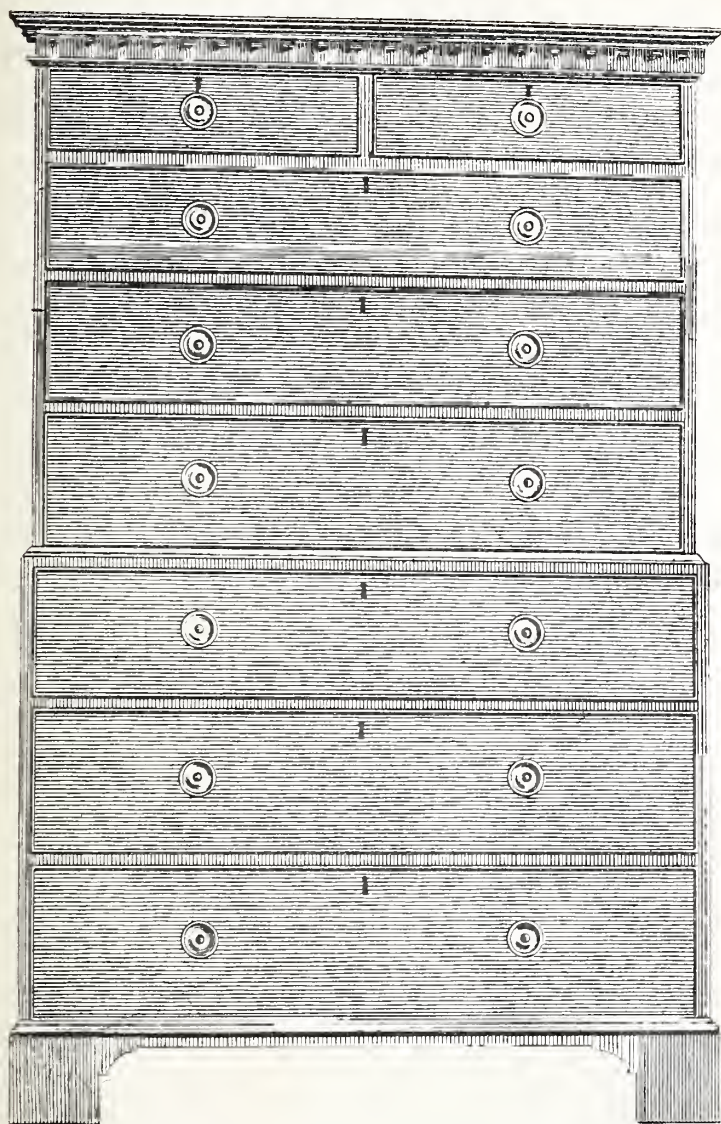
Panelling, on the other hand, if less actually suggestive of the outlying borderlands of sleep, and all the romance that hangs thereby, may, on purely decorative grounds, take as high a stand as antique tapestry ; it must be kept glossy as a mirror to give its best effect, and is most to be preferred when it happens to be inlaid with marquetry of lighter and darker woods. A bedroom entirely lined with old lacquer panels, dusky and golden, is instinct with rare charm, and, for all the grave dignity of its colouring, of eminently cheerful countenance.

The bedroom in a lighter vein, where sympathy with the *leitmotif* is, in essentials, ignored, and a certain show of flowery daintiness the main object kept in view, may, with advantage, have its walls hung with the same brocade or damask that covers chairs and sofas and forms the bed draperies. A pretty bedroom after this manner boasts bedstead and furniture of amber satinwood, decorated with painted festoons of garlands and ribbons. The brocaded bed-hangings, matching with the walls

and other upholsteries, present a bright, pale anarchy of pink roses, blue ribbons, quivers, and torches, flung together in lavish liberality upon a dove-coloured ground. The Aubusson carpet repeats many of the same tones in a lower key; the wide Chesterfield sofa, deeply stuffed and generously cushioned, is covered with the rose and ribbon-strewn brocade. While the bed, standing in a corner, with its head and one side of it to the wall, is partially screened by a diagonally disposed arrangement of draperies, meeting and crossing above, but looped back about midway lower down. The doors and the wainscoting are painted the same tone as the ground of the brocade; so is the tall antique chimney-piece and overmantel with its trailing flowers and pastorals carved in low relief, and its oval bevelled mirror. The clock and the ornaments are in Dresden china of a respectable—though not the best—period.

Of course, the ideal outlook for a bedroom is a garden. The strangely-painted chamber of Nicolette had missed more than half of its mysterious charm had it given on the street of Beaucaire instead of the moonlit close, where “she saw the roses blow, heard the birds sing high and low.” And thus the fit furnishing of a room in the country, where the general character of the decorations should lead up to the view, is a pleasanter, as well as a more grateful, task than the adornment of an urban sleeping-chamber, where the world beyond the windows is to be ignored, or dissimulated, as far as possible. The cloudy glooms of a dark London bedroom may, however, be very successfully alleviated on occasion by well-chosen harmonies of tone and colour. A case in point is a little chamber that promised by its aspect to be sufficiently cheerless, and yet, in despite of predestination,





DOUBLE CHEST OF DRAWERS, BY HEPPLEWHITE, 1789.



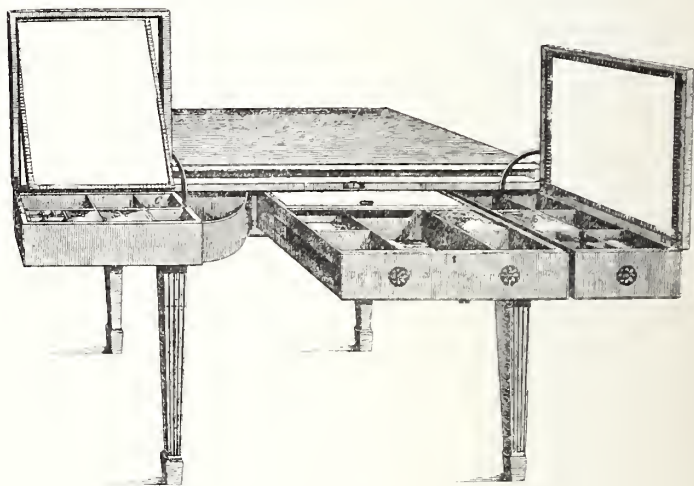
became an almost inspiring symphony in green and yellow. The walls are hung with a daffodil paper of gently unpretentious design, and the wood-work painted a tender green, warmer than willow, fresh and springlike in its intonation, but without those acerbities that are apt to creep into the pot of the painter when he essays a shade of colour neither commonplace nor morbid.

The pretty, flowery cretonne that canopies and valances the bed is all green, white and yellow—but mainly yellow—like a May meadow; and of this are the window draperies and curtains also, the short, frilled blinds being daffodil Nagpore silk. The furniture is made of the aforementioned green stained wood. And here, perhaps, it were well to note that by far the best and most dignified designs in this gear are held by Liberty's. The floor is covered over with a plain green Wilton carpet which matches the paint, and on this are strewn Oriental rugs wherein soft greens and yellows strike the dominant notes. On the walls hang simply-framed Japanese colour-prints, after Yeisan and Kiyo Sai—the most adequate substitutes we know of for the romance of outdoor nature, that sentiment of the seasons which in towns we are somewhat prone to forget.

Another distinctly engaging London bedroom is plenished, inappropriately it is true, yet with so much grace and sweetness, as to more than half persuade you of its justification. And, indeed, if there be any virtue in antithesis, this very contrast of sentiments has its proper charms. Delia in Town provoked the censure of her country swain, whose disparaging counsels may not have been altogether disinterested, while the Londoner's impressions concerning the rustic beauty would seem to have remained unrecorded. And that is as it

may be, while, congruous or no, this almost primly dainty room, with its hints of old-world country life set down in the heart of London, is pleasing alike to sight and sense.

First of all it is papered with an excellent reproduction (made in France) of a chintz-like early nineteenth-century design, an artistic powdering of cornflowers over a warm ivory-tinted ground. The rosewood bedstead has four very elegant and



A "RUDD'S" DRESSING-TABLE, BY HEPPLEWHITE, 1789.

slender columns, carved with classic simplicity into reedings and wheat-ears; the tester and hangings are made of a vastly pretty chintz besprent with striped tulips, carnations, and a nondescript blue flower, which adequately suggests an *entente cordiale* between wall-paper and hangings. All the furniture—of dark rosewood like the bed—is extremely plain and refined in form, making slightly even, for severity; it belongs to a simplified variant of the Hepplewhite tradition, graceful in the

lines, which are restrained to the verge of primness, and chaste in detail.

The flooring happens to be of polished oak, and the carpet is a square of solid colour, a dim green, with a border patterning of cornucopia and flowers. An earchair, covered with the same chintz as the window curtains, and valance, and the bed furniture, stands hard by the hearth inviting to slumberous meditation; the pierced brass fender is something inclined to loftiness, the vague impression of comfort evolved by a high-shouldered hobstove of wrought iron, ornamented in the fearless old fashion, is not found wanting. Along the high chimney-piece stand tall brass candlesticks, and blue Nankin jars of diverse build; while the illusion, such as it is, is furthered by a fragrance of lavender that drifts about the spacious chamber when the drawers or presses are opened; and again, more substantially, by the arrangement of the two windows. These have been constructed upon bygone principles; they are long, wide, and low, with leaded diamond-shaped panes, opening casement-wise and with old scroll fastenings; each forms a deep triptical embrasure lined with chintz-cushioned window seats.

THE END.







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